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ABSTRACT

These three booklets were designed to help Christian, Catholic, and Jewish congregations and parishes participate in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths on October 16-18, 1992. During the Children's Sabbath, religious services and programs focus on the needs of children and ways in which the religious community can help meet those needs. Each booklet in the set is geared toward a different faith: "A Little Child Shall Lead Us. A Christian Guide"; "Our Banavikh, Our Bonayikh. A Jewish Guide"; and "Hear Their Cry. A Catholic Guide." Booklets contain sections on: (1) suggestions for organizing, including ideas for promotion, newsletter inserts, and news releases; (2) suggestions and resources for the worship service; (3) activity suggestions for children, adults, and individuals of all ages; (4) follow-up activities for education, service, and advocacy; and (5) background information in the areas of maternal and child health, early childhood development, and family poverty. Appendixes in each booklet provide lists of organizations and resources for child advocacy. (MM)

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[GUIDES FOR THE NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS: CHRISTIAN, CATHOLIC AND JEWISH GUIDES.]

A Little Child Shall Lead Us

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A Christian Guide for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

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Children's Defense Fund

PS 021106

About CDF

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor, minority, and disabled children. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble.

CDF is a unique organization. CDF focuses on programs and policies that affect large numbers of children, rather than on helping families on a case-by-case basis. Our staff includes specialists in health, education, child welfare, mental health, child development, adolescent pregnancy prevention, family income, and youth employment. CDF gathers data and disseminates information on key issues affecting children. We monitor the development and implementation of federal and state policies. We provide information, technical assistance, and support to a network of state and local child advocates, service providers, and public and private sector officials and leaders. We pursue an annual legislative agenda in the U.S. Congress and litigate selected cases of major importance. CDF's major initiatives include our adolescent pregnancy prevention program and a prenatal care and child health campaign. CDF educates hundreds of thousands of citizens annually about children's needs and responsible policy options for meeting those needs.

CDF is a national organization with roots in communities across America. Although our main office is in Washington, D.C., we reach out to towns and cities across the country to monitor the effects of changes in national and state policies and to help people and organizations concerned with what happens to children. CDF maintains state offices in Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas; and local project offices in Marlboro County, South Carolina; the District of Columbia; Cleveland-Cuyahoga County, Ohio; and New York City. CDF has developed cooperative projects with groups in many states.

CDF is a private nonprofit organization supported by foundations, corporate grants, and individual donations.

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Contents

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman 1

1. Organizing Suggestions 5
- Planning a Children's Sabbath 5
- Some Ideas for Promotion 5
- Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: A Day in the Lives of America's Children 6
- Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: Every Sunday Morning... 7
- Sample News Release 9

2. Suggestions and Resources for the Worship Service 11
- Involving Children and Youths 11
- Sample Interfaith Children's Sabbath: "A Moral Witness for Children" 12
- Additional Worship Resources (Prayers, Readings, and Scriptures) 16
- Sermon/Homily Notes: "Called To Be Faithful Advocates" and "Do Not Lose Heart" 18
- Sample Children's Sermon: "The Selfish Gardener" 21

3. Activity Suggestions 25
- Children and Youths 25
- Adults 26
- All Ages 27

4. Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation 29
- Education 29
- Service 30
- Advocacy 31

5. Background Information 33
- A Healthy Start for Every Child 33
- A Head Start for Every Child 36
- A Fair Start for Every Child 40

Appendix 45
- Pledge for Children (Postcards) 45
- Resources for Faithful Child Advocacy 46
- Response Form 49

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Faithful Child Advocate:

I invite you to join me and hundreds of thousands of others across our nation in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths on October 16, 17, and 18, 1992.

The religious community can and must be a prophetic voice and presence, actively leading our nation to live out the ideals of compassion and justice. We must ensure that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

In this election year, as our nation sets its priorities for the next four years, it is important to call attention to the vulnerable young faces of children living in poverty. Our nation allows children to be the poorest Americans, depriving more than 13 million children of the opportunity to develop their potential. This needless tragedy of child poverty in our rich nation signals a loss of our national vision and priorities. Family and community values and supports are disintegrating, reflecting the spiritual as well as economic poverty permeating our nation. No fact tells us more clearly that something is badly awry in America than the reported abuse or neglect in 1990 of an American child every 13 seconds. The events in Los Angeles this spring demonstrated powerfully the need to address these and other crises overtaking children and families in our nation: it is time to see that we Leave No Child Behind.

What Is the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths?

Beginning with Shabbat services on Friday, October 16, and concluding with church services on Sunday, October 18, congregations across our nation will focus worship services, religious education, and congregational activities on the needs of children and how the religious community can help to meet those needs. It is our hope that the National Observance will catalyze thousands of persons into new, long-term commitments to act on behalf of children.

These Children's Sabbaths will lift a united voice of concern for the children of our nation, explore the faith-based imperative to speak out on behalf of the vulnerable, and encourage a commitment to help children through education, service, and advocacy.

Why Is the Children's Defense Fund Coordinating the Observance?

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation who cannot vote, lobby, or speak out for themselves. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble.

Since 1981 CDF has worked in partnership with the religious community to bring about change for poor and vulnerable children. The 1992 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is born out of the growing religious movement for children and aims to coalesce this concern and involvement in a united moral voice for children.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths has been endorsed by the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and a wide range of denominations and councils of churches. The Reverend Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ, serves on the Advisory Committee for the National Observance.

How Can Your Congregation Participate?

Congregations can participate in a variety of ways, depending on interests, resources, and time. Ideas and suggestions in this packet include:

- Suggestions and resources for the worship service (pp. 11-23)
- Photocopy-ready bulletin inserts (pp. 6-8);
- A sample news release (p. 9);
- Activity suggestions for religious education, and adult, singles, and youth groups (pp. 25-27);
- Follow-up suggestions to extend your congregation's involvement in meeting the needs of children (pp. 29-31).

PLEASE DON'T BE DAUNTED BY THE LENGTH OF THE MATERIALS! We have provided a broad variety of resources and suggestions so that you can pick and choose those that are appropriate for your congregation.

Your congregation's participation could be as simple as using a bulletin insert and distributing the Pledge for Children card, or as extensive as focusing the worship service, church school, and congregational activities on children. How much you do is less important than that you do *something* — that you respond to this opportunity to join with thousands of congregations in renewing and expanding our commitment to meeting the needs of children and families.

We have provided a variety of materials, many of which require little time to use. Still, October 18 may not be a good date for your congregation's observance of a Children's Sabbath. If so, I encourage you to plan one for a more suitable date. Most of these materials can be used any time.

Does Celebrating a Children's Sabbath Really Make a Difference?

The Children's Sabbaths held in Twin Cities congregations over the past few years have raised the awareness of members about the needs of children and have connected this new awareness with members' faith through sermons, prayer, litanies, and song. The deep faith basis has motivated these persons to take action on legislative issues for children either in the service or shortly after the service. These faithful child advocates numbering in the thousands now provide sustained action for children in need.

Let me share a few examples of specific celebrations in these area congregations: At Immanuel Lutheran Church a youth spoke about the important support churches can give young people in crisis; Colonial Church brought attention to children in worship through prayer, song, and the sermon and had six adult education programs on children's needs; Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church enclosed an action card in the worship bulletin with 20 suggestions for action for children; and Arlington Hills Lutheran Church's

Social Ministry Committee organized an offering of letters in support of policies that help children and families.

A Children's Sabbath *does* make a difference.

Please join us for this very special weekend of celebrating the children in our congregations, community, and nation. Help us to lift up their needs, and respond more fully to address them. Now more than ever, the children of our nation need us to reach out to them with compassion and speak out for justice on their behalf. The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is the beginning (or, for many, the continuation) of what I hope will be an ongoing relationship with you as we seek to lift the needs of children to the top of our communities' and nation's agenda. Our Religious Affairs Coordinator, Shannon Daley, works full-time to provide resources and assistance for the religious community. She is eager to support your and your congregation's faithful advocacy for children.

Thank you for all that you and your congregation do, and will do, on behalf of children.

In faith,

Marian Wright Edelman
President
Children's Defense Fund

1.
Organizing Suggestions

Planning a Children's Sabbath

Try to involve the congregation and perhaps recruit a committee to plan the activities leading up to and following this special service. Invite children and young people to join in. Or, invite the youth group to plan the service.

Choose the components of your observance. In addition to the worship service, activities may be planned for the church school (for adults and youths); coffee hour/fellowship time; and women's, men's, singles', or youth group meetings. You may also plan activities for Saturday, October 17, or use the Children's Sabbath to kick off an education series on the needs of children. After you have determined the basic range of activities, recruit volunteers to assist.

Before or after the Children's Sabbath, convene the planning committee, representatives of the social action committee, women's, men's, singles', and youth groups, church school, and any interested persons. Discuss building on the Children's Sabbath to develop long-term responses to the needs of children and families. **Section 4: Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation** may provide a useful starting point for discussion.

Some Ideas for Promotion

- Include announcements in your church newsletter or worship bulletin.
- Place one of the bulletin inserts, shown on the following pages, in your church bulletin or newsletter several weeks in advance of the actual service.
- Display posters announcing the Children's Sabbath (perhaps created as a church school activity) throughout the church.
- Adapt the sample news release on page 9 for the religious affairs section of the local newspaper.

The following three pages may be clipped out and duplicated for newsletter or bulletin inserts. Copy page 6 for a one-page insert. Photocopy pages 7 and 8 back-to-back on one sheet of 8-1/2" x 11" paper and fold in the middle for a ready-made four-page insert.

A Day in the Lives of America's Children

Every day in America:

2,685	babies are born into poverty.
638	babies are born to mothers receiving late or no prenatal care.
742	babies are born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds).
107	babies die before their first birthday.
2	children younger than five are murdered.
248	children are arrested for violent crimes.
176	children are arrested for drug abuse.
427	children are arrested for alcohol abuse or drunk driving.
10,988	public school students are suspended each school day.
2,250	students ages 16 to 24 drop out each school day.

Beginning with Shabbat services on Friday, October 16, and concluding with church services and Sunday School activities on Sunday, October 18, thousands of Jewish and Christian congregations across our nation will be participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. The Children's Sabbaths will lift up ways that we can faithfully respond to these and other problems facing children in our communities and nation.

Our congregation plans to participate!

Date: _____

Time: _____

To learn more about what our congregation is planning, and how you can become involved, contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

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WHAT SHOULD I DO TO LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND?

Each person of faith must do three things to help children:

1. Register and vote. Children can't vote. They can't hold politicians to campaign promises. But *you* can.

2. Ask candidates what they have done and will do for children. Tell them *all* American children need a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Write and call legislators and candidates. Meet with people running for election. Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. Write a letter to the editor. You can use the facts in this insert.

3. Learn more about what children need and about what already is working to meet their needs. Don't let anybody tell you that "nothing works." Visit good local groups that help children. Contact the Children's Defense Fund for information about its Child Watch and Child View '92 site visitation programs. And send in the form below for more information.

I WANT TO HELP!

❑ *Yes!* Please sign me up for the campaign to **Leave No Child Behind**. Tell me more about what I can do.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, state, zip: _____

Daytime phone: _____

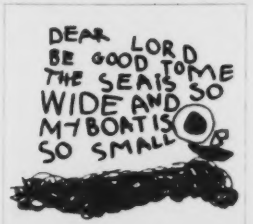
Church (optional): _____

Complete this form and mail in an envelope to: The Children's Defense Fund, Leave No Child Behind, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Every Sunday ... as

we wake up, 100,000 American children wake up homeless. ❧ **Every 32 seconds ...** about the time it takes us to say the Lord's Prayer ... an American baby is born into poverty. ❧ **Every 14 minutes ...** while we listen to the sermon or homily ... a baby dies in America. ❧ **Every 64 seconds ...** while we "pass the peace" ... a baby is born to a teenage mother. ❧ **And every 13 hours ...** before we go back to sleep each night ... an American preschooler is murdered.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND℠



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Then [Jesus] took a little child
and put it among them; and taking it in his
arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes
one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me
but the one who sent me."

Mark 9:36-37 (NRSV)

Today, the tragic reality is that too many of our nation's children are not being "welcomed" but instead are being left behind. Too many don't have the education, health care, homes, strong communities, and family supports they need to develop to their God-given potential.

WHAT DO AMERICA'S CHILDREN NEED TO DEVELOP TO THEIR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL?

They need every one of us to act for them before even one more child is left behind. *All* children need and deserve:

- **A Healthy Start** – basic health care for every child and pregnant woman.
- **A Head Start** – good quality preschool and child care to help them get ready for school, keep up in school, and prepare for the future.
- **A Fair Start** – jobs at decent wages, assured child support, and a refundable tax credit for families with children so that no child is homeless or hungry or so poor that he or she is left behind.

WE *CAN* ACT TO PROVIDE HOPE FOR OUR CHILDREN AND LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

We know how to nurture and raise healthy, well-educated, hopeful children. We know that investing in programs that work prevents suffering and saves money.

We know that Head Start, quality child care, prenatal care for pregnant women, and preventive health care for children all work, and make a difference in children's lives. Every dollar invested in these programs can save $3 to $10 in later health, special education, and other costs.

HOW DO WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?

Traditionally, churches have answered Christ's charge to "welcome" the child through spiritual nurture, education, and service. Now, in this election year 1992, we have an important new opportunity to answer Christ's call.

We can do a lot in our own churches and communities by volunteering time to help children or donating money to programs and people who work for children. But if we want to make sure no child is left behind, we also have to tell our elected leaders and those who ask for our votes that *they* have to work for children, too.

Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NRSV)

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information,
contact [name]
[telephone number]

[CONGREGATION] JOINS NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS

[Name of your TOWN, STATE] - On October 18, 1992, [name of congregation] will be participating in a National Observance of Children's Sabbaths designed to focus attention on the crises afflicting children and families in the United States. The National Observance has been endorsed by the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and a wide range of denominations and religious organizations. The National Observance is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation.

Children are the poorest Americans; one out of every five is living in poverty. More than 9 million children in a range of economic circumstances lack health insurance, unable to get care as basic — and vital — as preventive health care checkups and immunizations. Strong early childhood development, through Head Start programs and quality child care and preschool, is out of the reach of more than 1 million three-, four-, and five-year-olds because of inadequate local, state, and federal investments.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths aims to highlight the growing problems facing children in the United States and to involve the religious community in responding to these problems through public education, direct service, and public policy advocacy. Thousands of congregations across the nation will be focusing their worship services, religious education, and congregational activities on children throughout the weekend. An anticipated outcome of the National Observance is that thousands of persons will make a new, long-term commitment to act on behalf of children through their own congregation or in partnership with child-serving organizations in their community.

[Name of congregation] plans to join in the National Observance by [briefly describe plans for your Children's Sabbath].

For more information about [name of congregation]'s celebration for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, contact: [name, address of congregation, telephone].

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Photo © Bruce Reedy

2.
Suggestions and Resources for the Worship Service

- Use or adapt the sample service, "A Moral Witness for Children," on pages 12-16; develop your own Children's Sabbath using the prayers, readings, and scripture suggestions starting on page 16; create your own materials on the theme of children and need for action; or use readings from the prayer books that include a social action theme.
- Focus the sermon on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf. If appropriate, base the sermon on one of the sermon themes suggested on pages 18-21. **Section 5: Background Information** gives information about the state of children in our nation that you may want to incorporate.
- Use or adapt the sample Children's Sermon on pages 21-23.
- Name specific needs of children during the service. Again, **Section 5** provides useful information. Include prayers for the needs and suffering of children, specifically naming needs familiar to the congregation.
- Invite congregants to fill out the special Pledge for Children postcards. A description is provided on page 45, along with ordering information for multiple copies, free of charge.
- Collect a special offering to benefit a program serving children or families (such as a Head Start center, health clinic, or after-school program for low-income children). In advance, ask families to plan their contribution: new or used toys and books, a financial donation, or outgrown clothes in good condition. Encourage parents to use the planning time as an opportunity for the family to discuss children in need and to prepare the children for the Children's Sabbath. During the worship service, invite children (or families together) to bring their contributions forward to a basket on the altar.
- Highlight children's needs in the bulletin. Use one of the bulletin inserts found on pages 6-8.

Involving Children and Youths

The church school classes and youth groups could:

- Read prayers and biblical passages, and lead hymns or responsive readings.
- Greet worshipers as they arrive in or leave the sanctuary.
- Present a short drama for the sermon.
- Sing a special anthem.
- Participate in family worship services of prayer, story-telling, and singing, which could be designed for even very young children.
- Design and print the bulletin.

Sample Interfaith Children's Sabbath: "A Moral Witness for Children"

The following service may be used or adapted for an interfaith Children's Sabbath, bringing together community congregations with ministers, priests, and rabbis in the leadership. Alternatively, you may want to use sections from the service in your congregation's own Children's Sabbath observance.

❖ ❖ ❖

PRELUDE

PROCESSION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

CALL TO WORSHIP (based on Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Child 1: Every day in our nation, more than 2,500 babies are born into poverty.

Child 2: Every day in our nation, more than 1,800 children are reported abused or neglected.

Child 3: Every day in our nation, more than 600 babies are born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care.

Child 4: Every day in our nation, more than 700 babies are born too small to be healthy.

Child 5: Every day in our nation, more than 100 babies die before their first birthday.

Leader: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."

People: We come together with hearts that weep for our nation's children.

Leader: "Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; For there is a reward for your work, says the Lord."

People: We come together to be moved from weeping to hear the promise of the work we can do.

Leader: "[The children] shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country."

People: We come together to glimpse your vision of homecoming that would bring our nation's children from an experience of need to one of safety, plenty, and love.

Unison: Be with us in our worship and in our work, O God. Prepare us by the power of your spirit that we may commit our hearts and hands and minds to realizing your vision of homecoming for the children of our nation. Amen.

HYMN:

Here I Am, Lord.....Daniel L. Schutte

(based on 1 Samuel 3)

LITURGY ADAPTED FROM THE HOSHANOT SERVICE

Leader: Please save! For Your sake Our God
People: Please help us to save our children — for their sake.

Leader: Please save! For Your sake Our Creator
People: Please help us to save our children — for our sake.

Leader: Please save! For Your sake Our Redeemer
People: Please help us to save our children — for the future's sake.

Leader: Please save! For Your sake Our Advocate
People: Please help us to save our children — for the sake of the world.

Leader: As you saved Noah and his children
People: Help us to save our children now.

Leader: As you saved Isaac on the altar
People: Help us to save our children now.

Leader: As you saved the children of Jacob from famine
People: Help us to save our children now.

Leader: As you saved the children of Israel at the sea
People: Help us to save our children now.

Leader: As you have saved us so many times, O Lord,
People: Help us to save our children now.

Adapted from the Hoshanot Service by
the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

SCRIPTURE READING

SERMON

Clergy who do not follow the designated lectionary might consider the following passages and sermon themes:

Isaiah 65:17-25:
"Called as Partners for the New Creation"

Isaiah 61
"Bringing Good News to the Poor ... Our Nation's Children"

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Leader: For the millions of children who are living in poverty, that despite our society's rejection and inaction, they might feel loved and valuable in your sight,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our nation, that we are moved from tolerance of child poverty to passionate work for justice,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the parents who struggle each day to provide food, pay the rent, keep their families together, and just survive, that they might find community supports that enable them to nurture and spend time with their children,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the children whose needs are unmet, whose cries go unheard, and whose lives hold little joy, that we might fill their needs, respond to their pain, and seek to enrich their lives,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the children who are born too soon or too small, that they will receive the special care that they need,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the children who are sick and for their parents who don't know how they can pay the bills, that they find care and healing and their parents respite from worry,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our nation's leaders, that they might make children the nation's highest priority, and fulfill the promises that they make to the children,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For ourselves, that we might continue, with renewed determination, to serve and advocate on behalf of all children and see that no child is left behind,

People: O God, hear our prayer.

ANTHEM:

For the Beauty of the Earth .....John Rutter

CHARGE TO THE CONGREGATION

This portion of the service might lift up our responsibility to act and speak out for children in our personal, spiritual, professional, community, and public lives.

ACT OF COMMITMENT

Leader: In the book of Micah, we read:

"[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?"

In this time and in this place, let us covenant together to renew our commitment to the children, knowing that when we strive to do these things for the most vulnerable of our nation, we are seeking to do what is good in the eyes of God.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To do justice!

People: We covenant to do justice for the children of our nation, as we work to change policies that allow one in five to live in poverty.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To do justice!

People: We covenant to do justice, as we insist that the needs of our nation's children who cannot vote are not ignored in the election process.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To do justice!

People: We covenant to do justice, as we use our own votes to elect leaders who will best protect the rights and ensure the well-being of the children.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To love kindness!

People: We covenant to love kindness, as we nurture the children in our lives, and remember to listen to them.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To love kindness!

People: We covenant to love kindness, as we spend time with children, teach them right from wrong, and are good role models for them.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To love kindness!

People: We covenant to love kindness, as we reach out to support children and families through our work or personal involvement, ensuring that their needs are met in relationships that foster dignity and respect.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To walk humbly with our God.

People: We covenant to walk humbly with our God, as we seek God's guidance to know what is right for the children we touch and those on whose behalf we work.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To walk humbly with our God.

People: We covenant to walk humbly with our God, as we see God in each child, and as we respect all children as created equal and equally cherished by God.

Leader: What does the Lord require of us? To walk humbly with our God.

People: We covenant to walk humbly with our God, as we celebrate the gifts of children and lift up their needs in our places of worship.

Unison: And finally, we covenant to walk humbly with our God as we strive to do all of these things, knowing that we, as well as the young, are children of God and ultimately in God's care.

CLOSING HYMN:

Guide My Feet.....African American Spiritual

BENEDICTION/SENDING FORTH

May we go forth to celebrate the gifts of each child;
May we go forth to heal the hurts of each child;
May we go forth to seek justice for each child.
This we ask as ones who are claimed as God's children. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Additional Worship Resources
(Prayers, Readings, and Scripture)

Call to Worship
(Based on Mark 9:36-37)

Leader: "[Jesus] called a child and put it among them, and said 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' "

People: We come together today seeking within ourselves the faith, hope, and love of a child.

Leader: "[Jesus said] 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.' "

People: We come together today seeking the vision, understanding, and commitment to "welcome" the children as you would have us.

Unison: Be with us now in our worship, O God, that we may both find the trusting faithfulness of children, and assume our adult responsibility to nurture and protect our nation's children.

Prayer of Confession

Leader: Each day in our nation, when 100,000 children are homeless, living on the street or in shelters,

All: God, we confess that we look away, and pass by on the other side.

Leader: Each day, when the air is filled with the cries of more than 800 babies born at low or very low birthweight,

All: God, we confess that we cover our ears, and pass by on the other side.

Leader: Each day, when more than 1,800 neglected or abused children yearn to be hugged,

All: God, we confess that we withhold our comfort, and pass by on the other side.

Leader: Each day, when 27 children die from poverty, and 40 die or are wounded by guns,

All: God, we confess that we harden our hearts, and pass by on the other side.

God, open our eyes, ring in our ears, throw wide our arms, and soften our hearts, that we may receive these children in Christ's name, and so receive you who sent Christ. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Christ came that we might know ourselves to be God's children. And so we are! Children of God, believe the Good News: through Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Prayer of Intercession

Leader: Pray always, and do not lose heart. For the millions of children who are living in poverty, that they might receive the basic necessities to develop their potential,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: For the children who cried themselves to sleep last night with stomachs tight with hunger, that they be nourished and comforted,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: For the children who will tuck themselves into bed tonight, while their parents burrow into briefcases or newspapers, that families make time to enjoy and celebrate each other,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: For the parents who struggle to make ends meet, find jobs, and clothe and feed their families, that they might find support and compassion,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: For those in positions of power, that their hearts will not be that of the unjust judge, but instead be moved by your mercy and justice,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: For ourselves, that we are moved from complaisance about poverty and that we find the faithful persistence of the widow to challenge injustice,

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

Leader: "Will not God grant justice to [God's] chosen ones who cry to [God] day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice to them."

People: O God, hear our prayer. Help us not to lose heart.

All preceding worship resources written by Shannon P. Daley of the Children's Defense Fund. Some have previously appeared in *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches* and in "Keeping the Promise," Christian Worship Materials.

Children and the Bible

Use the following passages as the basis of a sermon, as verses for banners or posters, or to combine them in a reading: Gen. 48:8-9; Psalm 142:4; Proverbs 31:8-9; Isaiah 11:1, 3-4, 6; Isaiah 58:6-9a; Jeremiah 31:15-17.

Traditional readings of the Magnificat or psalms may reveal new meanings in the context of a Children's Sabbath, as we hear God's promise to lift up the poor and powerless.

Sermon/Homily Notes

The following are the consensus lectionary texts designated for October 16-22, 1992. Clergy who follow the lectionary may want to refer to the sermon notes, "Called To Be Faithful Advocates" and "Do Not Lose Heart," for ideas on relating the lectionary texts to children's issues.

Pentecost 22; Ordinary Time 29; Proper 24:

Psalm 119:137-144 (Common)

Old Testament
Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4 (Common)
Genesis 32:22-30 (Lutheran)
Genesis 32:3-8, 22-30 (Episcopal)

Epistle
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (Common, Lutheran, Episcopal)

Gospel
Luke 18:1-8 (Common)
Luke 18:1-8a (Lutheran, Episcopal)

Called to Be Faithful Advocates

Each of the passages designated for October 18, 1992, speaks to the need for persistence in the face of adversity: the widow relentlessly seeking justice from the king (Luke 18:1-8); Paul's second letter to Timothy (3:14-4:5), urging him to "proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with utmost patience in teaching"; and even Jacob wrestling throughout the night. (Genesis 32:22-30).

Perry H. Biddle, interpreting the passage from Luke, comments in *Preaching the Lectionary: A Workbook for Year C* (page 299): "Even though God can be trusted to hold to the divine purpose to work justice and mercy, nevertheless the faithful are to continue to pray for the coming of the kingdom....

"If an unrighteous judge will grant justice to the widow because she is relentless in pestering him, how much more will God vindicate the cause of the poor and needy.... The people of God are to be constant in prayer, ceaselessly pleading for justice and vindication of the poor and needy."

- Children are the poorest Americans; one out of five lives in poverty. What prayers for justice might we offer up? How might our prayers move us to action seeking justice with and on behalf of poor children and families? How might we make our very lives a prayer for these children?

Widows were totally powerless in society when the Lukan passage was recorded. Despite her powerless position, on the strength of her conviction alone the widow acted.

- When do we feel powerless to act for change in society? How might we, too, be called to act on the strength of our convictions despite feelings of impotence?

Biddle views the passage from Genesis in juxtaposition to Luke 18 and notes that "the persistent, aggressive behavior of Jacob," his "long night of wrestling and Jacob's refusal to give up without getting something out of the struggle" underscore the message that we are called to be faithful in prayers of petition, even in adversity.

Those of us who work on behalf of children — the poorest Americans — are familiar with the need for relentless persistence in advocacy. The words "faithful advocacy" have an important dual meaning: we are called to be faithful advocates who do not give up at the first obstacle or defeat. Instead, we are called to persist faithfully. Too, our advocacy must be faithful, finding its motivation, inspiration, and reinspiration in God.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund and advocate for children for decades, often tells a story about Sojourner Truth to exhort fellow child advocates as well as her own children to continued efforts:

"Never think life is not worth living or that you cannot make a difference. Never give up — I don't care how hard it gets. I know how discouraging it is to struggle to help the needy year after year with too few people and too little money and community support. An old proverb reminds, 'When you get to your wit's end, remember that God lives there.'...Hang in with your advocacy for children and the poor. The tide is going to turn.

"And don't think you have to 'win' immediately or even at all to make a difference. Sometimes it's important to lose for things that matter. Don't think you have to be a big dog to make a difference. You just need to be a persistent flea.

"My role model, Sojourner Truth, an illiterate slave woman who hated slavery and the second class treatment of women, was heckled one day by an old white man. 'Old woman, do you think that your talk about slavery does any good? Why, I don't care any more for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea.'

" 'Perhaps not,' Sojourner rejoined, 'but the Lord willing, I'll keep you scratching.' Enough committed fleas biting strategically can make even the biggest dog uncomfortable and transform even the biggest nation, as we will transform America in the 1990s." (From *The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours*, Beacon Press, 1992.)

The passage from Luke is one of the "how much more" parables, to use Biddle's phrase. "If an unrighteous judge will grant justice to a widow because she is relentless in pestering him, how much more will God vindicate the cause of the poor and needy." There is abundant evidence in our own society that we currently reflect the unjust realm of the judge and widow rather than the greater mercy and justice of God's Realm.

When thousands of children — one every 53 minutes — are dying from poverty in rich America every year and millions more suffer preventable sickness and chronic diseases, we know that our nation reflects the realm of the unjust judge and powerless widow, not the greater mercy and justice of God's Realm.

When our nation decides not to invest in such programs as summer Head Start, which would provide millions of low-income preschoolers with educational enrichment, nutrition, health care, and parent involvement that could give them a brighter future than their older brothers who took to the streets in rage and hopelessness, we know that our nation reflects the realm of the unjust judge and the powerless widow more than it does the greater mercy and justice of God's Realm.

- How do crises afflicting children in America, and our nation's failure to address them, reflect the realm of the unjust judge rather than God's Realm?

- How are we who care about children called to persist like the widow in the face of seemingly intransigent problems?
- How might we work persistently to help our nation reflect the mercy and justice of God's Realm?
- In the context of **Peace with Justice Week** (October 16-24, 1992), how might we pray and prayerfully work to address the violence that leaves two children murdered each and every day in our nation? How might we pray and prayerfully work to provide positive opportunities and activities for children, before they become one of the 248 children who are arrested for violent crimes each day in our nation?
- Following **World Food Day** (October 16, 1992), how might we pray and prayerfully work to address childhood hunger? Because of the depth and breadth of poverty, one in eight American children is reported to be suffering from hunger. (See "Resources for Faithful Child Advocacy" on page 46 for further information on childhood hunger available from Bread for the World and World Food Day.)
- How might our lives be lived as a prayer for justice and well-being for all children?

Do Not Lose Heart

Reflection on Luke 18:1-8

An adult, whether a parent or not, who has tried to withstand the pleadings of a child can identify with the judge in the parable. And any child who has found success by wearing down a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle knows the determination of the widow.

Although different from most of Jesus' parables, this one is consistent with Jewish teachings in Jesus' day, and may be illustrative of Proverbs 25:15: "With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones."

The persistent widow and the proverb are important to us as we seek to provide justice for the children of our congregation, our community, our nation, and our world. But children, too, are examples to us by their persistence. When we feel downhearted for lack of progress, when we feel defeated after a hard-fought debate, when we feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of a problem, let us step back and recall the child, the widow, and the proverb. Let us remember also why the parable was told. The writer of Luke says that Jesus told this parable so his hearers would remember "to pray always and not to lose heart." Rather than pie-in-the-sky, the parable reminds us of God's goodness and justice that, unlike the frustrated judge's, are motivated by love.

Today we are the unjust judge. The cries of the widow are the cries of parents throughout our land and throughout the world. When will we listen? When will we grant justice? How long will it take to wear us down?

Today we are also the justice-seeking widow. We cry out for children: children of poverty, children at risk, children who are abused, children who are spoiled, children who are unwanted, children who have AIDS. Like the widow we must continue our pleading, for how else will the structures of power be worn down, as was the unjust judge?

As overwhelming as this may feel to us — finding ourselves both the widow and the unjust judge — we persist because the parable, the proverb, and the child remind us

that we can do nothing else. God is with us — when we succeed, and when we fail. God both calls us to this task and supports us in it.

Thus, we are judge and widow. When our task — whether to admit complicity and need of forgiveness or to stand strong for children — overwhelms us, we turn to God who forgives us and sustains us. We are filled with new resolve and return to our calling with hope and energy.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- When do you feel like the judge? When do you feel like the widow?
- What causes you to lose heart?
- What helps you to keep the faith or to persevere?
- What convinces you to persist in what you believe is right or necessary?
- Why is this parable important to persons and groups that seek justice? What does it teach you about God?
- How does this parable relate to the life and work of your committee, fellowship group, or congregation?

Prayer

Great God of justice and perseverance, grant us the gift of determination that we may wear down the walls of injustice and the footings that hold them up. Let us not lose heart, remembering that your love ever surrounds us. Call to us so that our prayers may be constant before you. Finally, keep us aware of the cries of children around us and throughout our world, so that we don't become the unjust judge. All this we ask in your great mercy and through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Based on a reflection by Carol A. Wehrheim, Church Educator, Princeton, NJ. Originally printed in *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*, by Kathleen A. Guy, Children's Defense Fund.

Sample Children's Sermon: The Selfish Gardener

There once was a wonderful garden right in the middle of a large city. The garden was in a neighborhood that was very poor.

The owner of the garden had lived in this neighborhood for a long time. He had lived in the neighborhood when it was filled with people who had plenty of money, people who planted beautiful gardens filled with lovely flowers and plants full of vegetables and fruit and trees bent over from the fruit on the branches. But now this gardener was the only person left on his block who had money and time enough to plant a garden.The gardener was especially proud of all the fruits and vegetables he grew. Can you guess what fruits and vegetables the gardener might have grown in his garden? [Invite children to name fruits and vegetables.] That's right! (Juicy red strawberries, bright orange pumpkins, fat red tomatoes, yummy grapes, huge yellow squash, big

green peppers, and crunchy string beans.) His fruits and vegetables were beautiful and good to eat! He had enough for himself and his family and lots left over. But he never shared his fruits and vegetables. Lots of good things just rotted in baskets beside his door.

There was a woman who lived in the neighborhood. She was poor, even though she worked long hours cleaning other people's houses. Her husband was sick and her children were small. And they were hungry.

This woman used to walk past the garden on her way to the bus stop. She saw all those vegetables and fruit on the plants. She saw the left-over vegetables in the baskets.

One day, she saw the man in his garden and asked if she might have some vegetables and fruit. She said she would weed the garden if she could have some food for her family. The selfish gardener said, "No! Go away and leave me in peace."

The next day, the woman passed the garden on her way home from work. "Please, may I have some of your left-over vegetables? I will weed your garden or clean your house."

"No," said the selfish gardener. "Go away and leave me in peace!"

But the woman would not leave the selfish gardener in peace. She needed that food for her family. She was willing to earn it. She knew it was wrong to waste food when her family was hungry. She believed she should keep asking for help. So she kept coming back, day after day, at different times because the gardener tried to hide out in his house so he wouldn't have to talk to the woman. But she kept coming back, finding him when he wasn't expecting her. She kept on asking for what she needed.

Finally one day, the selfish gardener could stand it no longer. At last, the gardener decided to give the woman what she asked for. He gathered up the basket of left-over food and gave it to the woman. He even added some tomatoes and strawberries that he picked right off the plants. The woman went home very happy, knowing she had helped her family.

God is our *good* gardener. God has given us this whole world as a beautiful garden in which we are to share the good things God has given us. Our good gardener, God, is not like the selfish gardener. God does not want us to be selfish gardeners, either. God wants us to pray for ourselves, for each other, even for people we don't know. God wants us to pray and pray and pray some more. God wants us to ask for help to make this world the garden of sharing it should be, where everyone has a safe place to live and plenty to eat. God hears us and helps us. God wants us to never stop praying—with our words *and* with our lives.

How can we pray with our lives? What are some ways we can help make this world a garden to be shared with everyone?

In the Garden

In Trenton, New Jersey, there are some men and women who wanted to make the city a better place for children and grown-ups. They decided to help people grow gardens in the vacant lots in all the neighborhoods. Soon there were gardens where there used to be broken glass and old tires and other trash.

The people in the neighborhoods are proud of their gardens, filled with fruit and flowers. They like to show their community gardens to visitors.

One day, a bus full of children from a city summer program came to visit one of the gardens. They walked past boarded up houses; they walked over broken glass; they walked by porches that were falling into the sidewalk. Then they came to the garden. All the children could say was "wow!" when they walked through the gates.

As the summer program children walked through the garden, other children from the neighborhood began to gather outside the garden fence. These neighborhood children called out mean names and made fun of the visitors. Suddenly the woman who was showing the garden began to call out, "Sebastian, come in! Rajeem, I want these visitors to meet all our best gardeners. Edwina, you must show these visitors your tomatoes. Come inside!" Soon the children outside the garden were inside, being introduced as special helpers in the garden. Soon those children who had been calling mean names were telling the names of the flowers they had grown. Soon there was peace and sharing in the garden.

What a beautiful picture of the way God wants our world to be! A place where everyone is on the inside, sharing and living in peace.

Children's Sermon written by the Reverend Patricia L. Daley, Pastor, Bethany Presbyterian Church, Trenton, NJ.

Photo © Nita Winter

3.

Activity Suggestions

These suggestions can be used for church school groups, youth groups, women's, men's or young adults meetings, or during a special time of celebration following the service.

Children and Youths

- **Discuss the Children's Sabbath with the children two or three weeks in advance.** Talk about the meaning of the day, why you want to celebrate children, and why you want them to pray to God for the needs of the nation's children. Tell them what the teachers and congregation are planning and what the students' roles will be. Ask them to think of ways they could take part or would like to celebrate. If parts in a service need to be assigned, decide which children will do what.
- **A week or two in advance, have the children create a large banner to decorate the sanctuary or church school room for the Children's Sabbath.** See page 17, "Children and the Bible" for possible passages for the banner. Guide discussion on the meaning of the passages as they relate to children, before or during banner-making. Or, use the banner-making as an activity for the day of the Children's Sabbath itself.
- **Have a children's work party clean and decorate the sanctuary or church school room(s) before the Children's Sabbath.**
- **Use the children's artwork to decorate the church building.**
- **Have the children create Leave No Child Behind T-shirts;** explain that when they wear them they will be teaching grown-ups and children an important message. Ahead of time (for younger children) print on the back "One in five children is poor. Jesus said 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'" On the front, have the children print Leave No Child Behind and decorate with fabric markers or paints. Before or during the shirt-making, guide discussion on the meaning of the message.
- **Have young children decorate posters that are pre-printed with the slogan Leave No Child Behind.** Crayons, markers, or pictures cut from magazines can be used. Send the posters to elected officials in local, state, and national offices. Include a cover letter explaining the Children's Sabbath. Take a photograph of the children with their posters before you mail them. Display the photograph where your congregation will see it. If possible, have prints made for the children.
- **Focus the church school curriculum on biblical attitudes toward children and social justice,** as well as brief lessons concerning underprivileged children. Help the children come up with ideas of how to respond to those problems. Help them select and implement a feasible idea.

- **Encourage the youth group to devote one or more of its meetings to learning about the needs of children and what the group can do.** You may want to use or adapt the **Background Information** material found in **Section 5**.
- **With the young people, create a list of ways they can act on behalf of children in the congregation, community, or nation. Section 4: Follow-Up Suggestions** and the action suggestions in **Section 5** may provide useful ideas. The list could include writing to legislators asking them what they are doing to meet the needs of children, volunteering at a children's shelter or day care center, tutoring, and working in a food pantry or emergency shelter. Check with programs in your area for some specific suggestions to offer the young people. After the list is created, provide ways for the group to volunteer, either together or individually.
- **Help the children and young people rehearse a skit, song, or poetry readings for the fellowship time.**
- **Have the children (with adult help) prepare the refreshments for the fellowship time/coffee hour.** If low-cost items are planned (such as cupcakes made and decorated by the children), commit the money saved to a children's program in the community. Help the children select the program to be the beneficiary.

Adults

- **Organize an adult Leave No Child Behind forum.** Invite persons from the congregation or the community to be on a panel to discuss the unmet needs of children and families in your community, state, and nation in the areas of health, early childhood education and development, and child poverty. Ask them to address the programs and policies that work to help children, and policies in need of change. Allow time for questions and answers. If possible, allow time to develop a plan of action based on what the group has learned.

  To secure speakers, consider contacting a representative from your community's hospital neonatal intensive care unit or health clinic to speak about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area; a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address his or her program and its needs; the director of a local child-serving program or an organization that works on behalf of children.
- **Encourage the women's, men's, and young adults' groups to plan an educational program, short-term study course, or series on the needs of children.** Invite a speaker from a local child-serving program or organization advocating on behalf of children to address the group(s). Ask the speaker to end with suggestions of what the group could do to address the problem. Leave time for discussion of these possibilities and an action plan.
- **Arrange a Children's Awareness Tour for members of your congregation.** Arrange visits with public and private agencies concerned with children and families. Invite business and religious leaders, public officials, and members of the media to join you. Help participants consider how they can use their personal and professional roles to meet the needs of children. Write to the Children's Defense Fund and ask for information on the Child Watch and Child View '92 site visitation programs.

- **Write to or telephone candidates' offices and ask for their position papers, or information, on children's issues.** Make this information available to congregants.
- **Invite candidates for public office to a forum to hear about the problems of children in your community** and to talk about how they intend to work with you to address those problems.

All Ages

- **Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a children's organization.** Work with the youth group to plan and carry out the activity and to select the organization to receive the donation. Build an educational component into the fund-raising activity. If it is a car wash or bake sale, for instance, work with the organization to create and then hand out flyers with information about the particular problem being addressed by the organization, and how the organization is helping. If the organization has volunteer or other needs, publicize those as well.
- **Plan for the children and adults to plant a tree** outside the church to commemorate the Children's Sabbath.
- **Start a congregational scrapbook to commemorate the Children's Sabbath.** Purchase a scrapbook with plenty of removable pages. Spread the pages on tables with markers, pens, and crayons. Invite children, youths, and adults to contribute by drawing or writing their thoughts and feelings about the Children's Sabbath and what they learned. Some may want to record a prayer for children. Some families may want to work on a family page. Ahead of time, ask particular youths (or children with adult supervisors) to serve as official photographers for the day. After the Sabbath, compile the scrapbook and make it available for congregation members to peruse. Plan to add to it during the next Children's Sabbath celebrated by your church.
- **Organize a trip to a food bank,** where families in the congregation can bring food and help with sorting, bagging, or other tasks. Find out what **World Food Day** (October 16) activities have been planned by individuals and organizations in your community, and how your congregation might be involved as an extension of its Children's Sabbath observance.
- Find out if any individuals or organizations are planning activities for **Peace with Justice Week** (October 16-24) in your community. If so, explore how you might participate or connect your Children's Sabbath observance with their efforts. If not, you may want to promote children's issues as the theme for Peace with Justice week in your community.

Photo © Nita Winter

4.

Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
>
> *I Corinthians 12:4-7*

The following range of suggestions is divided into three categories: *education* on the needs of children; *service* to meet these needs; and *advocacy* on behalf of children.

The suggestions could be initiated, planned, and implemented by the minister(s), the social action committee, church school teachers, adult or youth groups, or by a new committee with representatives of these groups and other concerned individuals. Consider sharing copies of these suggestions with representatives of each group, and then arrange a time to discuss how the congregation or groups within it might commit to long-term action with and for children.

Education

> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit....
>
> *I Corinthians 12:8*

- Write to your denomination's educational resource center, public policy office, and relevant program staff and ask for their materials about children in the United States and around the world. Commit a shelf in your church library to display information on children in need and highlight possibilities for outreach and advocacy action. Recruit volunteers to update it regularly.
- If the Children's Sabbath observance did not include educational forums or meetings, set aside a future meeting date and invite a representative from a children's organization to speak about children's issues and ways the congregation can help.
- Invite several congregants to write articles for the church newsletter summarizing what they have learned about children's issues. Consider asking a child, a youth, and an adult to write and share their unique perspectives on the Children's Sabbath observance and the issues it highlighted.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the unmet needs of families and children in your area and encourage strong local action.

- Learn about the status of children in your community. Find out which child-serving organizations would benefit most from some form of assistance. Assess your congregation's resources (human, financial, and physical) and make an appropriate commitment to help.
- Find out what support services are available for children and families, and publicize their availability in the church and in the community. If support services in your community are inadequate, consider supplementing or establishing new ones by teaming up with other religious or professional organizations.
- If the Children's Sabbath did not include a Children's Awareness Tour for the congregation (see page 26), plan a suitable date for one.

SERVICE

> Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you...?'
>
> And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'
>
> *Matthew 25:37-40*

- Consider donating congregational space to a program serving children, youths, and families or to an organization advocating on behalf of children. Consider Head Start or child care programs, parent support groups, and others.
- Maintain an updated listing of child-serving organizations with volunteer opportunities. Describe the skills, interests, and time required for each position, and encourage congregation members to reflect on how they would best like to help children: tutoring, fund raising, or lending professional skills such as nursing to an organization. Publicize volunteer opportunities in the church newsletter.
- "Adopt" a child-serving organization, providing a range of assistance such as financial support, donation of goods, or professional expertise in fund raising, promotion, or management.
- If your congregation is suitably located, sponsor free hearing and vision testing. Contact the local school board for information about clinics that administer these tests at public schools. Publicize the event to day care centers, shelters for homeless women and families, and in low-income neighborhoods. Or hold monthly "free doctor/dentist" days, using members of your congregation and other religious groups participating. Publicize the days, times, and addresses in targeted areas.
- Organize a congregational service corps among the teenagers in your church. Establish a youth coordinating committee in your congregation to plan and implement the service corps.

ADVOCACY

> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
>
> *Isaiah 58:6*

- Monitor legislation affecting children and families, and inform your representatives of your views. Organizations such as Bread for the World, the Children's Defense Fund, Church Women United, Interfaith IMPACT for Justice and Peace, and denominational public policy offices provide information — from a faith perspective — about pending legislation. Monitor the impact of the legislation on your community or state.
- Write the president and your U.S. representative and senators. Describe your concern about the state of children. Ask them what they will do to Leave No Child Behind and ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Ask for a reply. Write to:

  The Honorable _____
  U.S. House of Representatives
  Washington, DC 20515

  The Honorable _____
  U.S. Senate
  Washington, DC 20510

  The President
  The White House
  Washington, DC 20500

- Write your governor, state senator, state representative, and mayor urging them to support effective federal, state, and local investments in children. State and local child advocacy organizations have information on legislation. Do your part in making sure programs for children are well implemented.
- Organize meetings with candidates, elected officials, and staff to learn more about their positions on children's issues and to provide them with information on the needs of children and how to meet those needs.
- Call CDF's legislative hotline tape, (202) 662-3591, for information and needed action on pending legislation affecting children and families.

Photo © John Arms

5.
Background Information

This section contains background information, reflection or discussion questions, and action suggestions for three areas: maternal and child health, early childhood development, and child and family poverty.

This material can be used:

- As background information for a sermon focusing on children;
- As the basis of an education program for adults or the youth group; or
- To help the social action committee explore new directions for addressing the needs of children and families.

A Healthy Start for Every Child

The prophecy from Isaiah proclaims these promises of God: "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth.... No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime." (Isaiah 65:17a, 19b, 20a)

Thousands of years ago, when this vision of God's new creation was recorded, many parents helplessly watched their babies die because they lacked the knowledge and resources to prevent the premature deaths of their children.

Today, too many parents still watch their babies die. Each year in America 40,000 babies die before reaching their first birthday, a rate worse than those of 19 other nations. And 400,000 children who do survive will be left with lifelong disabilities such as retardation, cerebral palsy, and vision, learning, and hearing disabilities.

Unlike in Isaiah's day, we have the knowledge and resources to prevent much of this suffering. A White House Task Force on infant mortality determined in 1989 that one in four of all U.S. infant deaths and disabilities is fully preventable with well-known and cost-effective health measures such as early, comprehensive prenatal care for pregnant women. Yet nearly 25 percent of all U.S. infants are born to mothers who do not receive care early in pregnancy.

America's children are falling behind the world's children in their access to health care and in their health status in other areas as well. Our children are less likely to be fully immunized against polio in infancy than children from Pakistan or Poland. The United States ranks seventeenth in the world in fully immunizing one-year-olds against polio.

Our failure to invest in proven, preventive care results in enormous moral, social, and economic costs. For instance, in addition to the incalculable toll in human suffering, the infant mortality gap between the United States and Japan costs our nation about $7 billion per year.

Why do America's pregnant women, infants, and children fail to get the preventive health care they need? One reason is that more than 30 million Americans live in com-

munities where they have little access to basic health care. These are usually rural or inner-city areas without enough doctors or clinics. For example, the government's studies show that the recent decline in immunization rates and the 16-fold increase in measles cases were caused by the rapidly shrinking access of American children to health services—not to parents' failure to use available services.

The second main reason is that millions of American children and their families have no health insurance. Between 9 million and 11 million children and 10.6 million women of childbearing age are completely uninsured. Millions of others have insurance that is inadequate, failing to cover essential services such as well-child visits, prenatal care, or immunizations.

Today, our nation has both the knowledge and the resources to prevent unnecessary child deaths, disabilities, and illness, as the prophet envisioned God's intention for a new creation. How can we participate in realizing that hopeful vision?

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How does the vision of God's new creation as recorded in Isaiah speak to the health of our nation's children today?
- What do you consider to be the moral costs of our nation's failure to provide preventive, affordable health care to all children? What are the social costs? What are the economic costs?
- Are we — as a faith community or as a nation — responsible for helping every child get a Healthy Start? Explain.
- What are some of the child health needs that your group knows are not being met in your community?
- What resources are available in your congregation to meet the health needs of children? Consider finances, volunteers, and facilities or equipment.
- Can you identify specific issues within child health that your group is interested in pursuing? How might you go about organizing an activity for your group or congregation?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child A Healthy Start?

We must make certain that all Americans have either private or public health insurance and that health care is available to children and their families wherever they may live. We must give *all* our children a good start in life, by guaranteeing that *all* mothers can get early, regular prenatal care and that *all* children can get the vaccines, the checkups, and the prompt treatment that will start them on the road to healthy development.

As a congregation or as one person of faith, we can participate in working toward a "new creation" of health and wholeness. We can:

Learn More

- Invite a representative from your community's hospital or health clinic to speak to your congregation about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area.

- Arrange a visit to a health clinic, Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) site, or neonatal intensive care unit, and find out what can be done to improve the health of children and families.

Reach Out

- Arrange to use the church van or your private vehicle to transport pregnant women or parents and children to care health appointments.
- Offer a prenatal care class through your church.
- Donate church space for immunization clinics.
- "Adopt" a health clinic and provide financial support and volunteers.
- Provide child care for children while their mothers go for prenatal care.

Speak Out

- Meet with people running for office. Tell candidates that children should be an important election year issue. Tell them *all* American children need a Healthy Start.
- Write and call legislators and candidates and ask them how they will meet child health needs.
- Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. You could ask questions such as:

  "What will you do to ensure that all young children are immunized fully?"

  "What steps would you support to ensure that all pregnant women have full access to prenatal care and that all children receive regular preventive health care and treatment?"
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. You can use the facts that you have learned today, or write to the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for free materials to help ensure that we Leave No Child Behind in this election year and insist that every child is given a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

A Head Start for Every Child

Listen to the hopeful prayer of the psalmist: "May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars, cut for the building of a palace." (Psalms 144:12)

What kind of early childhood experiences and environment do the sons and daughters of our nation need to flourish as plants full grown, and to be as solid and stable as corner pillars of a palace?

In the infant and toddler years, a youngster needs good nutrition and health, a strong and nurturing family, and the varied and rich early childhood experiences that will encourage rather than stifle curiosity and eagerness to learn. By the time the child is three or four years old, some of those experiences are likely to be taking place outside the home, in a child care home or center, or at a preschool, and those experiences also should be safe, loving, and stimulating.

In 1990, recognizing that these early childhood experiences are crucial to success in school and after, President Bush and the governors named school readiness for all young children the first of six national education goals. Yet available indicators of the well-being of young children show how woefully far we are from reaching the goal.

Very modest investments during the early years have been shown to save much larger sums later. Every $1 spent on high quality preschool education saves an estimated $3 in later special education, crime, welfare, and other costs. Yet Head Start, which Congress and the Bush Administration promised to fund fully by 1994, had funding to serve fewer than one in three eligible children in 1991.

Our communities, our work places, and our nation offer little support for parents engaged in the extraordinarily difficult task of caring for young children. Unlike 16 other industrialized nations, including Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the United States has no family leave policy (paid or unpaid) to allow parents to stay home with an infant without jeopardizing their jobs and income.

Unlike those same nations, we have failed to ensure the availability of high quality, affordable child care. Although 61 percent of mothers with children ages three to five were in the labor force by the end of the 1980s, the National Research Council concluded in 1990 that "Poor...quality [child] care threatens children's development, especially children from poor and minority families."

Our continued failure to attend to the well-being of young children is not only a tragic waste of their potential, but a gamble with our nation's economic future. Among our major competitors, the United States stands out for its paucity of efforts to ensure that children enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure.

Head Start

Head Start is the successful preschool program for disadvantaged three- to five-year-olds that ideally should be available to every eligible child.

Experts in early childhood development say that Head Start's success in preparing children for productive lives is based on two important elements. First, the program is comprehensive. Recognizing that children who are undernourished or have untreated medical problems cannot learn efficiently, Head Start provides hot meals, immunization against childhood diseases, and screening and treatment for vision, hearing, and other medical and dental problems.

Second, Head Start supports children's healthy development by strengthening their families. Head Start teaches parents to see themselves as the primary teachers and advocates for their children. In addition, Head Start provides family counseling and referral to other community resources and government assistance programs, trains parent volunteers to work in the program, encourages them to continue their own education, and employs parents of students as more than one-third of its paid staff members.

The combination of comprehensive services and family involvement pays off for Head Start children. Research consistently shows that children who attend Head Start score higher on achievement tests and are more likely to meet the basic requirements for school than control groups. Once in school, Head Start graduates are less likely to be placed in special education classes or to be held back in school than other children from similar backgrounds.

And young adults who participated in preschool programs similar to Head Start are more likely than their peers to be literate and employed or enrolled in postsecondary education. They are less likely to be school dropouts, teen parents, dependent on welfare, or in trouble with the law.

Despite its record of success, Head Start never received enough funding to both increase enrollments and cover rising costs. The landmark reauthorization of Head Start in 1990 created the potential for yearly increases in Head Start enrollment (subject to appropriations by Congress) until the program is able to serve all eligible children starting in 1994, at a cost of $7.7 billion. The reauthorization also earmarked more money for quality improvements, including funds for staff training, established new criteria for classroom teachers, approved a new transition program to continue Head Start's comprehensive services for children after they enter school, and allowed funds to be used for full-day, full-year child care for Head Start students whose parents work.

For more information about Head Start, contact:

Children's Defense Fund
Child Care Division
25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

National Head Start Association
1220 King Street
Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- What are some of the factors that help children develop to their God-given potential, flourishing "like plants full grown"?
- What are some of the supports that help parents raise healthy, secure children?
- How does your congregation currently help provide positive early childhood experiences or support for parents?
- Is supporting and strengthening families an appropriate role for a faith community? Why or why not?
- What are some of the needs for early childhood or parent support programs in your congregation or community?
- What are some of the resources (human, financial, and in-kind) available in your group or in your congregation that might be directed to address early childhood needs or parent support?
- In which of the issues within early childhood development are group members most interested? How might you develop an activity for your group or congregation?

What Can We Do To Ensure Every Child A Head Start?

To ensure that all of our nation's children have a Head Start and enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure, we must commit ourselves to each of the steps required to meet that goal:

- Family leave policies that enable parents to care for an infant without jeopardizing the family's income;

- A place in Head Start for every eligible child, as promised by President Bush and Congress;
- High quality and affordable child care available in all communities for all children;
- Community programs that help support parents in providing a secure and stimulating environment for their children's development.

As a congregation or as individuals, to help give every child a Head Start, we can:

Learn More

- Visit a Head Start program to see it in action. Arrange a time to talk with the teachers and parents, if possible, to learn about the program's strengths, as well as the existing barriers to its effectiveness. Find out what individuals or congregations can do to support the program and the children it serves.
- Invite a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address your congregation about her or his program and its needs.
- Learn more about community programs that support families (generally called family resource, family support, or parent education programs) by helping parents meet the challenges of raising children and respond more fully to their children's needs. Determine if your congregation might support an existing program or help develop one.
- Contact the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009) and the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for more information on child care and Head Start programs and on pertinent legislation.

Reach Out

- Support a child care or Head Start program by volunteering or providing financial support or material goods. Or explore the possibilities of housing a Head Start program in your church.
- Until there is adequate funding for full-day, full-year Head Start programs, explore how your church might provide a supplementary after-school or summer program for Head Start students.
- Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a child care program, or set up a scholarship fund to help parents who cannot afford child care.
- Develop or house an after-school child care program or full-day child care program in your church. Excellent resources to assist you are available from: The Ecumenical Child Care Network, 1580 N. Northwest Highway, Parkridge, IL 60068-1456.

Speak Out

- Attend candidate forums and ask the candidates how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start. If they are candidates for state office, ask them what they believe your state should do to increase the availability of affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs.

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about the need for strong early childhood programs for every child and policies that support parents.
- Arrange to take candidates to visit Head Start or child care centers and to brief them on the need for available, affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs. Ask them how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start.

A Fair Start for Every Child

In Proverbs 31:8-9 we read "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Who are "the poor and needy" today in our nation?

Infants and children are, in fact, the poorest Americans. More than 13.4 million American children — one out of every five — live in poverty.

The fact that children are the most common victims of poverty is not the only startling fact disproving widely held stereotypes about who is poor:

- Most poor families with children have at least one worker, and earnings from employment, not welfare, are their largest source of income.
- More poor children are white (5.9 million) than are black (3.7 million).
- More poor American children are living outside central cities than inside them.
- Nearly two-thirds of all poor families with children have only one or two children.
- And while single-parenthood drives up poverty rates, even if the United States had no children in single-parent families we still would have one of the highest child poverty rates among all industrialized societies.

Why Have So Many Children Become Poor?

The child poverty crisis is worsening, rather than getting better. In 1990 alone, 840,000 children were added to the ranks of the poor. Child poverty has increased by more than 25 percent since 1979. There were 3 million more poor children in 1990 than 11 years earlier.

The declining effectiveness of government income programs in bringing families with children up above the poverty line accounted for **nearly half** of the increase in the poverty rate among families with children between 1979 and 1989. More than half of all government cash transfer payments (from programs such as Social Security, veterans benefits, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children) go to nonpoor families. Only $1 in every $12 of such payments in 1987 went to families with children that were poor or would have been poor in the absence of that government help. Government spending cuts during the 1980s also hurt poor families with children.

Changes in the job market that increased unemployment, lowered earnings, and left more workers unable to support their families were responsible for **almost one-third** of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children. For example, the minimum wage is worth less than 80 percent of its real (inflation-adjusted) 1979 value. As a result,

full-time, year-round work at the minimum wage ($8,840) isn't nearly enough to bring a family of three above the poverty line (an estimated $10,723 in 1991).

The increase in the proportion of children living in single-parent families (a phenomenon in part driven by earnings declines) was the third but relatively smallest major force, contributing **about one-fourth** of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children.

Impossible Choices: A Group Exercise in Understanding Child and Family Poverty

In a group discussion of child poverty, distribute photocopies of the "Impossible Choices" box on page 41. Have a volunteer read aloud the first paragraph, which sets out a typical example of poverty as it affects a working family. Then ask group members to fill in the worksheet as you read the following information to them:

> "Working full-time, year-round at a job *above* the minimum wage yields you $824 per month. So on the blank line next to 'wages' on your worksheet, please fill in $824."

When group members have done so, read aloud the following:

> "The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that it costs $309 a month to provide a nutritionally adequate diet over the long term for a three-person family such as this. So, please fill in $309 on the blank line next to 'Food.'*"

When group members have done so, read the following:

> "In 1991 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-determined average Fair Market Rent for a modest, two-bedroom apartment in the United States was $510. The recommended limit for a family's housing costs is one-third of its income. By that calculation, this family should be living in housing that costs no more than $274 a month."

Have group members fill in the $510 HUD-determined figure for rent.* When group members have done so, ask them to fill in the blank next to child care with "$165.00" for the three-year-old (the 10-year-old stays with a neighbor after school), which is the average monthly cost of child care for one child.

Then, ask group members to fill in the "Subtotal" blank. This subtotal should be $984.00.

By comparing the "wages" figure ($824) and the basic expenses ($984), group members can see the difficulty of making ends meet for this parent who works full time. How do families such as this manage?

One potential source of income is child support. While state agencies are supposed to help collect child support payments from delinquent spouses, it's collected in fewer than one in three cases. In 1989, $5.1 billion in court-ordered child support went unpaid by absent parents. Have your group write $0 next to child support.

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* Some group members may suggest that the three-person family could spend less on food or housing. Remind them that if they wish to skimp on food, resulting in a nutritionally inadequate diet, they may need to factor in later health costs. Likewise, if a group member believes the family could find cheaper housing, ask the group what some of the hidden costs of substandard housing might be (such as health costs and irreversible damage due to lead exposure).

Impossible Choices

You are the single parent of two children ages three and 10. You work full time, year-round, at a job above minimum wage. Still, your earnings of $9,885 leave your family at the poverty line. Your employer does not provide health insurance. Your ex-spouse fails to provide court-ordered child support of $100 per month.

To understand the impossible choices facing poor families, decide how you would try to make ends meet:

Income		*Basic Expenses*	
Wages:	$_____ per month	Food:	$_____ per month
Child support:	$_____ per month	Rent & utilities:	$_____ per month
EIC:	$_____ per month	Child care:	$_____ per month
AFDC:	$_____ per month	Subtotal:	$_____ per month
Food stamps and housing assistance:	$_____ per month	**Surplus for all other expenses:**	
Subtotal:	$_____ per month	**$_____ per month**	

Family Needs Beyond Food and Shelter

The following are expenses for family needs beyond food, shelter, and child care. Which could you afford? Which would you forgo?

Selected household expenditures	*Average monthly expenditures of low-income* three-person households, 1988-1989*
Car upkeep/gas/public transportation	$142
Furniture/household equipment	48
Children's clothes	23
Adult clothes	39
Telephone	41
Health expenses	86
Housekeeping supplies	29
Educational expenses/reading	22
Insurance	16
Total	$446

* Income less than $20,000

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey. Calculations by the Children's Defense Fund.

Another source of support is the Earned Income Credit available to low-income working families on a *refundable basis*, meaning that working families such as this whose incomes are so low that they owe no federal taxes can receive a check for the credit. If the parent chooses, employers must add EIC benefits to regular paychecks. Tell group members that this family's Earned Income Credit, per month, would be $102.91 (for an annual total of $1,235). Instruct them to fill in that figure on the line next to "EIC."

Inform them that many families that are eligible for this credit fail to obtain it because they do not know they are eligible, or they don't know how to complete the forms to get the credit.

(Optional: Select several group members to represent families that do not know about the Earned Income Credit or how to receive it. While everyone else is asked to add $102.91 to their monthly income, tell those persons selected to enter $0, to understand impact of that lost benefit and the need for community outreach to help eligible families receive it.)

Group members will see that this working family still will not be able to keep its head above water financially without additional support. Another source of support for some poor families is the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) grant. The size of AFDC grants vary by state. The nation's average maximum monthly AFDC benefit for a three-person family in January 1992 was $372.

To see if this family is eligible for AFDC, food stamps, or housing assistance and how much money they would receive in your state, call your state welfare department. If this family is eligible for any of these benefits in your state, tell group members to fill in the amount the family would receive on the appropriate line next to AFDC or food stamps and housing assistance. If this family does not meet your state's "standard of need," leave the line(s) blank. Tell the group that nationwide the average poor family with children got only $141 in food and housing benefits a month in 1989.

Ask group members now to subtotal their income, and subtract their basic expenses and child care costs from that subtotal. After arriving at a figure, the group should fill in the amount on the line next to "Surplus for all other expenses."

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How did you feel when you learned that children are the most common victims of poverty? Which fact surprised you the most?
- How do you think our society's misconceptions about who is poor affect our response?
- What responsibility do you feel to "Speak out for those who cannot speak"? What responsibility do you believe our nation has to "defend the rights of the poor and needy"?
- What would be the hardest aspect of being a working parent who is only able to keep your family teetering on the brink of the poverty line?
- How would you try to manage if you were this parent? Which expenses would you have to forgo or cut back? What might be the hidden costs of spending less on food, housing, child care, or health care?
- What might be the impact of one illness, such as an ear infection?

- If you were this parent, what would be the greatest help or support for which you would hope?
- What are some of the poverty-related problems that you see facing children in your community or throughout the state?
- What resources are available in your congregation to meet the needs of poor children and families (for example, funds, volunteers, facilities, or equipment)?
- Can you identify specific issues within child poverty that your group is interested in pursuing? If so, how might you go about organizing an activity?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child a Fair Start?

It is essential to this nation's moral and economic future that we eliminate child poverty, a goal well within our reach by the year 2000. As a nation, it is time to honor our pro-family rhetoric with action, by providing a floor of support under every child, through:

- Decent wages and job opportunities;
- An adequate refundable child tax credit and other refundable tax credits;
- Child support guarantees;
- Parental leave policies.

As a congregation or as one person, we can raise our voices on behalf of our nation's children, who are voiceless and powerless in the halls of government.

Learn More

- Know the facts about child poverty in your community, state, and the nation. The Children's Defense Fund has information and resources to help you both learn about and address the needs of children through education, outreach, and public policy advocacy. See page 46 for additional organizations and written resources to help you.
- Visit a local program that serves low-income children and families. Ask the service providers what problems they see facing children and families. Ask what they need to serve the children better — financial support, volunteers, donation of goods, and changes in public policies.

Reach Out

- Provide support to a local program that serves low-income children and families by volunteering, making a financial donation, or providing needed items.
- Participate in the Earned Income Credit community outreach project to help eligible low-income working families learn about and obtain this credit. For more information, write to: The 1992 Earned Income Credit Campaign, The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 777 N. Capitol St., N.E., Suite 705, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 408-1080.

Speak Out

- Speak out about public policies on the local, state, and federal level that affect children and families. Contact your denomination's public policy office, an ecumenical

organization such as Interfaith IMPACT for Justice and Peace, Bread for the World, or the Children's Defense Fund Office of Religious Affairs for information to help you faithfully advocate on behalf of children and families.

- Attend candidate forums and ask candidates how they will ensure that every child has a Fair Start. Additional questions might be:

  "How do you propose to reduce childhood poverty in America?"

  "Will you work to ensure that any congressional tax relief proposal includes a refundable tax credit that will benefit *all* families with children?"

  "What steps would you take to ensure that custodial parents receive the child support payments to which they are entitled?"

- Arrange a "site visit" to take candidates to visit programs that are serving poor children and families, as well as to sites that demonstrate the need for stronger leadership and improved policies to help poor children and families, such as neonatal intensive care units where two-pound babies reveal the costs of our nation's failure to invest in prenatal and preventive health care for all pregnant women and children.

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about child poverty and urging strong action from every sector of the community — from government to business to media to the religious community.

APPENDIX

ORDER *FREE* POSTCARDS FOR YOUR CONGREGATION!

Involve your congregation in helping America's children! Multiple copies of two Pledge for Children postcards are available *free* from the Children's Defense Fund. Use the Minister Response Form on page 49 to order.

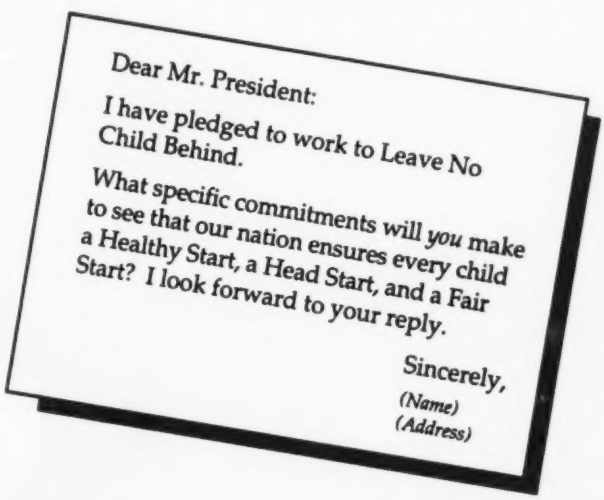
Pledge for Children
I pledge to do justice for children, by:
I pledge to love mercy, as I reach out to children and:
I pledge to walk humbly with my God as I:
[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?
Micah 8:9

PLEDGE FOR CHILDREN

Make a pledge of commitment to the children in your congregation, community, and nation. Keep the pledge portion of the card to remind you how to plan to do justice for children, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Send the other portion of the card in for additional information about what *you* can do for America's children!

TO THE PRESIDENT

Let the President know that you have made a Pledge for Children, and ask what he will do to make sure our nation leaves no child behind! Send the postcard back to the Children's Defense Fund – we'll deliver thousands to the White House from congregants across the country at the start of the new presidential term.


Dear Mr. President:
I have pledged to work to Leave No Child Behind.
What specific commitments will *you* make to see that our nation ensures every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start? I look forward to your reply.
Sincerely,
(Name)
(Address)

Resources for Faithful Child Advocacy

Organizations

Bread for the World
802 Rhode Island Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20018
(202) 269-0200

The Children's Defense Fund
Office of Religious Affairs
25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

Interfaith IMPACT for Justice and Peace
100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 543-2800

National Council of Churches
Office of Child and Family Justice
475 Riverside Drive, Room 572
New York, NY 10015
(212) 870-3342

Ecumenical Child Care Network
1580 N. Northwest Highway
Parkridge, IL 60068-1456
(708) 298-1500

Written Resources

Children Let Us Love: Children's Activity Booklet, Reformed Church Press, 1992. Published in cooperation with and available from Bread for the World Institute (60 cents each).

Concern Into Action: An Advocacy Guide for People of Faith, Tina Clark, 1990. Available from Interfaith IMPACT ($8).

Gleanings of the Spirit, Worship Aid, and related materials, U.S. National Committee for World Food Day (free).

Keeping the Promise 1991: Christian Worship Materials, edited by RESULTS Educational Fund ($3).

"Putting Our Children First," Background Paper, Bread for the World, 1992 (25 cents each).

Recognizing and Celebrating Children: Congregational Resources Volumes I and II, prepared by Congregations Concerned for Children, Minneapolis, MN ($7.50 each or $12.50 for both).

The State of America's Children 1992 , Children's Defense Fund ($14.95).

Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches, by Kathleen A. Guy, Children's Defense Fund, 1991 ($14.95).

Also, be sure to contact your denomination, and find out what resources and staff are available to support your efforts.

WELCOME THE CHILD: A CHILD ADVOCACY GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

Learn more about guiding your congregation in faithful advocacy for children. ***Welcome the Child*** is designed for clergy, staff, and everyone involved in children's ministries, Christian education, worship and music, mission and outreach, and political advocacy. This guide describes how to involve the congregation in child advocacy, include children and their concerns in the congregation's worship and programming, and tap into national denominational programs for children. 152 pp., revised in 1992. ISBN: 0-938008-84-6. $14.95 (includes postage).

WELCOME THE CHILD

☐ **Yes!** I want to continue to guide my congregation in faithful advocacy for children! Please send me _____ copy/ies of ***Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*** ($14.95 per copy).

Name: _____

Church: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

To Order: Please complete this form, clip out, and mail in an envelope with payment to CDF Publications, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Only orders over $25 may be billed. Price includes postage.

RESPONSE FORM

❑ **Yes,** I would like _____ (quantity) of the Pledge for Children postcards, free of charge. Please send them to:

Name _____

Church _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Telephone _____

❑ My congregation will be conducting Children's Sabbath activities on:

_____
(date)

We plan to:

- ❑ Focus the worship service on children's issues through the sermon, prayers, or other: _____
- ❑ Involve children and youths more fully in the worship service.
- ❑ Use the Pledge for Children postcard.
- ❑ Have special congregational activities, including: _____

  _____
- ❑ Use the bulletin/newsletter inserts or news release.
- ❑ Develop long-term follow-up activities.
- ❑ Hold an adult education program or youth group meeting on children's issues.
- ❑ Other: _____

  _____

  _____

Please remove this page and mail it in an envelope to: Religious Affairs, Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Order postcards early to be sure you have them in time for your Children's Sabbath activities!

.ST COPY AVAILABLE

Our Banavikh, Our Bonayikh

A Jewish Guide
for the National
Observance of
Children's Sabbaths

Children's Defense Fund

PS 021106

58

About CDF

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor, minority, and disabled children. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble.

CDF is a unique organization. CDF focuses on programs and policies that affect large numbers of children, rather than on helping families on a case-by-case basis. Our staff includes specialists in health, education, child welfare, mental health, child development, adolescent pregnancy prevention, family income, and youth employment. CDF gathers data and disseminates information on key issues affecting children. We monitor the development and implementation of federal and state policies. We provide information, technical assistance, and support to a network of state and local child advocates, service providers, and public and private sector officials and leaders. We pursue an annual legislative agenda in the U.S. Congress and litigate selected cases of major importance. CDF's major initiatives include our adolescent pregnancy prevention program and a prenatal care and child health campaign. CDF educates hundreds of thousands of citizens annually about children's needs and responsible policy options for meeting those needs.

CDF is a national organization with roots in communities across America. Although our main office is in Washington, D.C., we reach out to towns and cities across the country to monitor the effects of changes in national and state policies and to help people and organizations concerned with what happens to children. CDF maintains state offices in Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas; a Prenatal Caring and Child Advocacy Project in Marlboro County, South Carolina; and local project offices in the District of Columbia, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and New York City. CDF has developed cooperative projects with groups in many states.

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Contents

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman 1

1. Organizing Suggestions 4
- Planning a Children's Sabbath 4
- Some Ideas for Promotion 4
- Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: Every Shabbat Morning... 5
- Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: A Day in the Lives of America's Children 7
- Sample News Release 8

2. Suggestions and Resources for the Service 9
- Involving Children and Youths in the Children's Sabbath Service 9
- Prayers, Poems, and Readings 10

3. Children's Sabbath Activity Suggestions 15
- Religious School Groups and Youth Groups 15
- Adults 16
- All Ages 17
- Suggestions for Sukkot 17
- Suggestions for Simchat Torah 18

4. Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation 19
- Education 19
- Getting Involved 20
- Advocacy 20

5. Information and Resources 22
- A Healthy Start for Every Child 22
- A Head Start for Every Child 24
- A Fair Start for Every Child 28

Appendix 34
- Pledge for Children (Postcards) 34
- Resources: Organizations and Publications 35
- Rabbi Response Form 37

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Rabbi:

I invite you to join me and hundreds of thousands of others across our nation in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, designated for October 16, 17, and 18, 1992.

The religious community can and must be a prophetic voice and presence, actively leading our nation to live out the ideals of justice and *gemilut hasadim*. We must ensure that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

In this election year, as our nation sets its priorities for the next four years, it is important to call attention to the vulnerable young faces of children living in poverty. Our nation allows children to be the poorest Americans, depriving more than 13 million children of the opportunity to develop their potential. This needless tragedy of child poverty in our rich nation signals a loss of our national vision and priorities. Family and community values and supports are disintegrating, reflecting the spiritual as well as economic poverty permeating our nation. No fact tells us more clearly that something is badly awry in America than the reported abuse or neglect in 1990 of an American child every 13 seconds. The events in Los Angeles this spring demonstrated powerfully the need to address these and other crises overtaking children and families in our nation: It is time to see that we Leave No Child Behind.

What is the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths?

Beginning with Shabbat services on Friday, October 16 and concluding with church services and Sunday School activities on Sunday, October 18, Jewish and Christian congregations across our nation will focus worship services, religious school programs, and related activities on the needs of children and how the religious community can help meet those needs. It is our hope that the National Observance will catalyze thousands of persons into new, long-term commitment to action for children.

These Children's Sabbaths will lift a united voice of concern for the children of our nation, explore the faith-based imperative to speak out on behalf of the vulnerable, and encourage a commitment to help children through education, *gemilut hasadim*, and advocacy.

Why Is the Children's Defense Fund Coordinating the Observance?

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation who cannot vote, lobby, or speak out for themselves. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of all children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, before they drop out of school, before they suffer family breakdown, or before they get into trouble.

Since 1981 CDF has worked in partnership with the religious community to place the needs of all children at the top of our national and community agendas, to bring about change for children, especially poor and vulnerable children. CDF's Religious Affairs staff works in conjunction with religious staff and volunteers at all levels to

mobilize congregations in communities across our nation to respond to the needs of children by engaging in public education, community outreach, and advocacy.

The 1992 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is born out of the growing religious movement for children, and aims to coalesce this concern and involvement in a united moral voice speaking out on behalf of our nation's children. The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths has been endorsed by the **Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and the National Council of Churches of Christ**. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the UAHC, and Mr. Alan Tichnor, President of the United Synagogue of America, serve on the Advisory Committee for the National Observance.

How Can Your Congregation Participate?

Congregations can participate in a variety of ways, depending on interests, resources, and time. Ideas and suggestions are included in this packet, including:

- Suggestions and resources for the service (pages 9-14);
- Photocopy-ready bulletin inserts (pages 5-7);
- A sample press release (page 8);
- Activity suggestions for religious school groups, Sisterhood, Men's Club, and Youth groups (pages 15-16);
- Ideas for the *oneg shabbat* (pages 15-18);
- Follow-up suggestions to extend your congregation's involvement in meeting the needs of children (pages 19-21).

DON'T BE DAUNTED BY THE LENGTH OF THE MATERIALS! We have provided a broad variety of resources and suggestions so that you can pick and choose those that are appropriate for your congregation.

Your congregation's participation could be as simple as using a bulletin insert and distributing the Pledge for Children card, or as extensive as focusing the service and religious school program on children. How much you do is less important than that you do *something* — that you respond to this opportunity to join with thousands of congregations in renewing and expanding our commitment to meeting the needs of children and families.

We have provided suggestions to incorporate a focus on children into Sukkot and Simchat Torah. The weekend of October 16 still may not, however, be a good weekend for your congregation's observance of a Children's Sabbath. If so, I encourage you to plan one for a more suitable date. Most of these materials can be used for any date.

Does Celebrating a Children's Sabbath Really Make a Difference?

Let me tell you about just one example. In Minneapolis, Sheila Field, a member of Adath Jeshurun Congregation, heard her rabbi deliver a sermon about children living in poverty. In an interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac, Rabbi Harold Kravitz explained how people of faith are particularly called to stop the sacrifice of children to poverty, hunger, and homelessness, and to advocate for children.

Sheila Field was moved to action; she coordinated a forum, "Children at Risk: You Can Help," sponsored by the social action committees of area synagogues and Jewish community agencies. The more than 100 participants were encouraged to view themselves and their congregations as valuable resources for children.

As a result of the forum, Adath Jeshurun developed a partnership with a transitional housing program, and Beth El Synagogue is supporting a child care center.

A Children's Sabbath *does* make a difference.

Please join us for this very special weekend of celebrating the children in our congregations, community, and nation. Help us to lift up their needs, and respond more fully to address them. Now more than ever, the children of our nation need us to reach out to them with compassion and speak out for justice on their behalf. Our hope is that it is the beginning of a strong and enduring partnership to improve the lives of children throughout our nation.

> In foretelling G-d's redemption of the people of Israel after their exile, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "All your children shall be disciples of the Lord, and great shall be their happiness."
>
> But the Rabbis said, "The word should not be read 'children' (*banavikh*); it should rather be read 'builders' (*bonayikh*). For the children of a nation are the builders of its future."

When we as a nation act to Leave No Child Behind, the well-being of every child will indeed reflect G-d's shalom and the redemption of our nation. I look forward to working together to support our nation's children — the builders of our future.

Shalom,

Marian Wright Edelman
President, Children's Defense Fund

1.
Organizing Suggestions

Planning a Children's Sabbath

Try to involve the congregation in planning this special service and in activities leading up to and following the service. You might want to recruit a committee to help plan and carry out the day. Invite children and young people to join in. Or invite the Youth Group to plan the service.

Choose the components of your observance. In addition to the service, three other possible segments for activities are the religious school, *oneg shabbat*, and Sisterhood, Men's Club, or Youth Group meetings. You might choose to plan for one of these segments or for all four. You may concentrate all your efforts on a single day, or use the Children's Sabbath Day as the kick-off of an education series on the needs of children.

After you have determined the basic range of activities, recruit volunteers to assist.

Before, or after, the Children's Sabbath, convene the planning committee, representatives of the social action committee, Temple Sisterhood, Men's Club, Youth Group, religious school, and any other interested persons. Discuss possibilities for building on the Children's Sabbath to develop long-term responses to the needs of children and families. **Section 4: Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation** may provide a useful starting point for discussion.

Some Ideas for Promotion

- Include announcements in your synagogue newsletter or bulletin.
- Place the bulletin inserts, included in this kit on pages 5-7, in your synagogue bulletin or newsletter several weeks in advance of the actual service.
- Display posters (perhaps created as a religious school activity) throughout the synagogue.
- Adapt the sample press release on page 8 for the religious affairs section of the local newspaper or the local Jewish newspaper.

The following three pages may be clipped out and duplicated for newsletter or bulletin inserts. Copy page 7 for a one-page insert. Photocopy pages 5 and 6 back-to-back on one sheet of 8-1/2" x 11" paper and fold in the middle for a ready-made four-page insert.

What Should I Do To Leave No Child Behind?

Each of us must do three things to help children:

1. Register and vote. Children can't vote. They can't hold politicians to campaign promises. But *you* can.

2. Ask candidates what they have done and will do for children. Tell them *all* American children need a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Write and call legislators and candidates. Meet with people running for election. Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. Write a letter to the editor. You can use the facts in this insert.

3. Learn more about what children need and about what already is working to meet their needs. Don't let anybody tell you that "nothing works." Visit good local groups that help children. Contact the Children's Defense Fund for information about its Child Watch and Child View '92 site visitation programs. And send in the form below for more information.

I WANT TO HELP!

❑ *Yes!* Please sign me up for the campaign to **Leave No Child Behind**. Tell me more about what I can do.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, state, zip: _____

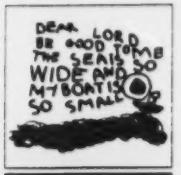
Daytime phone: _____

Synagogue (optional): _____

Complete this form and mail in an envelope to: The Children's Defense Fund, Leave No Child Behind, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Every Shabbat Morning ... as we wake up, 100,000 American children wake up homeless. ❧ **Every 32 seconds ...** about the time it takes for us to recite the V'Ahavta ... an American baby is born into poverty. ❧ **Every 14 minutes ...** while we listen to the sermon ... a baby dies in America. ❧ **Every 64 seconds ...** as we sing the Alenu ... a baby is born to a teenage mother. ❧ **And every 13 hours ...** before we go back to sleep each night ... an American preschooler is murdered.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND℠



Children's Defense Fund

Thus said the Eternal:
A cry is heard in Ramah, Wailing, bitter weeping -
Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted
For her children, who are gone.
Thus said the Eternal:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward in your labor – declares the Eternal,
They shall return from the enemy's land
And there is hope for your future - declares the Eternal
and your children shall return to their country.

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Today, the tragic reality is that too many of our nation's children are not finding hope in their futures but still are being lost or left behind. Too many don't have the education, health care, homes, strong communities, and family supports they need to develop to their G-d-given potential.

What Do America's Children Need To Develop to Their Potential?

They need every one of us to act for them before even one more child is left behind. *All* children need and deserve:

- **A Healthy Start:** Basic health care for every child and pregnant woman.
- **A Head Start:** Good quality preschool and child care to help them get ready for school, keep up in school, and prepare for the future.
- **A Fair Start:** Jobs at decent wages, assured child support, and a refundable tax credit for families with children so that no child is homeless or hungry or so poor that he or she is left behind.

We *Can* Act To Provide Hope For Our Children And Leave No Child Behind

We know how to nurture and raise healthy, well-educated, hopeful children. We know that investing in programs that work prevents suffering and saves money.

We know that Head Start, quality child care, prenatal care for pregnant women, and preventive health care for children all work, and make a difference in children's lives. Every dollar invested in these programs can save $3 to $10 in later health, special education, and other costs.

How Do We Make It Happen?

Traditionally, synagogues have helped meet the needs of children through spiritual nurture, education, and service. Now, in election year 1992, we have an important new opportunity to advocate for children.

We can do a lot in our own synagogues and communities by volunteering time to help children or donating money to programs and people who work for children. But if we want to make sure no child is left behind, we also have to tell our elected leaders and those who ask for our votes that *they* have to work for children, too.

Speak up for [those unable to speak,]
for the rights of all the unfortunate.
Speak up, judge righteously,
champion the poor and the needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9

A Day in the Lives of America's Children

Every day in America:

2,756	teens become pregnant.
1,340	babies are born to teen mothers.
2,754	babies are born out of wedlock.
638	babies are born to mothers receiving late or no prenatal care.
742	babies are born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds).
2,685	babies are born into poverty.
107	babies die before their first birthday.
2	children younger than five are murdered.
248	children are arrested for violent crimes.
176	children are arrested for drug abuse.
427	children are arrested for alcohol abuse or drunk driving.
10,988	public school students are suspended each school day.
2,250	students ages 16 to 24 drop out each school day.

Beginning with Shabbat services on Friday, October 16, and concluding with church services and Sunday School activities on Sunday, October 18, thousands of Jewish and Christian congregations across our nation will be participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths.

Our congregation plans to participate!

Date: _____

Time: _____

To learn more about what our congregation is planning, and how you can become involved, contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Children's Defense Fund

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information,
contact [name]
[telephone number]

[CONGREGATION] JOINS NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS

[Name of your TOWN, STATE] - On October [16th or 17th], 1992, [name of congregation] will be participating in a nationwide Observance of Children's Sabbaths designed to focus attention on the crises afflicting children and families in the United States. The National Observance has been endorsed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and the National Council of Churches of Christ, and is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, a national non-profit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation.

Children are the poorest Americans; one out of every five children is living in poverty. More than 9 million children in a range of economic circumstances lack health insurance, unable to get care as basic — and vital — as preventive checkups and immunizations. Strong early childhood development, through Head Start programs, quality child care, and parental leave policies, is out of the reach of more than 1 million three-, four-, and five-year-olds due to inadequate federal, state, and local policies and funding.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths aims not only to highlight the growing problems facing children in the United States, but also to involve the religious community in responding to these problems through public education, direct service, and public policy advocacy. Thousands of congregations across the nation will be focusing their worship services, religious education, and congregational activities on children throughout the weekend. An anticipated outcome of the National Observance is that thousands of persons will make a new, long-term commitment to acting for children through their own congregation or in partnership with child-serving organizations in their community.

[Name of congregation] plans to join in the National Observance by [briefly describe plans for your Children's Sabbath].

For more information about [name of congregation]'s celebration for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, contact: [name, address of congregation, telephone].

###

2.
Suggestions and Resources for the Service

- Develop your own Children's Sabbath using the songs, poetry, and prayers provided on pages 10-14, or create or choose your own materials that reflect the theme of children and need for action.
- Use readings from the prayer books that include a social action theme. Reform congregations may want to select a service with social action themes from *Gates of Prayer* (service number 4, for instance).
- Focus the sermon on Jewish perspectives on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf. If appropriate, base the sermon on one of the sermon themes suggested in this section. **Section 5: Information and Resources** provides background information on the state of children in our nation that may be useful.
- On Friday night, incorporate the parental blessing for children into the service. Or incorporate the need to bless all children into the Shabbat morning blessing of Bar/Bat Mitzvah children.
- Name specific needs of children during the service. Again, Section 5 provides information that may help you do so. Include prayers for the needs and suffering of children, specifically naming needs that will be familiar to the congregation and praying for communities in need with which the congregation is involved.
- If appropriate, invite congregants to fill out the special Pledge for Children cards described on page 34. Or distribute the pledge cards to be filled out by congregants after Shabbat.
- Distribute or insert one of the bulletin inserts found on pages 5-7.

Involving the Children and Youths in the Children's Sabbath Service

The religious school classes and youth groups could:

- Read prayers, Torah, and Haftorah readings, and lead songs or responsive readings.
- Greet worshippers as they arrive in or leave the sanctuary.
- Present a short drama for the sermon.
- Participate in family Shabbat afternoon or early evening programs of prayer, story-telling, and singing.
- Design and print the bulletin.

Prayers, Poems, and Readings

Use the following passages as the basis of a sermon, as verses for posters, or to combine them in a reading.

> And Israel beheld Joseph's sons and said, "Whose are these?" And Joseph said to his father, "These are my children, whom the Lord has given to me in this place." And he said, "Bring them to me, and I will bless them."
>
> *Genesis 48:8-9*

> Speak up for [those unable to speak], for the rights of all the unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy.
>
> *Proverbs 31:8-9*

> A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
> A twig shall sprout from his stock.
> The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him:
> A spirit of wisdom and insight,
> A spirit of counsel and valor,
> A spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD.
> He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the LORD:
> He shall not judge by what his eyes behold.
> Nor decide by what his ears perceive.
> Thus he shall judge the poor with equity
> And decide with justice for the lowly of the land....
> Justice shall be the girdle of his loins,
> And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.
> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
> The leopard lie down with the kid;
> The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,
> With a little boy to herd them.
>
> *Isaiah 11:1-4a, 5-6*

> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
>
> *Isaiah 58:6-9a*

For behold! I am creating
A new heaven and a new earth;
The former things shall not be remembered,
They shall never come to mind.
Be glad then, and rejoice forever
In what I am creating.
For I shall create Jerusalem as a joy,
And her people as a delight;
And I will rejoice in Jerusalem
And delight in her people.
Never again shall be heard there
The sounds of weeping and wailing.
No more shall there be an infant or a graybeard
Who does not live out his days....
My chosen ones shall outlive
The work of their hands.
They shall not toil to no purpose;
They shall not bear children for terror,
But they shall be a people blessed by the LORD,
And their offspring shall remain with them.

Isaiah 65:17-20a, 22a-23

Thus said the Eternal:
A cry is heard in Ramah, Wailing, bitter weeping –
Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted
For her children, who are gone.
Thus said the Eternal:
Restrain you voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears; for there is reward in your labor –
declares the Eternal,
They shall return from the enemy's land
And there is hope for your future – declares the Eternal,
and your children shall return to their country.

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Zohar, i, 227b When the children are blessed, the parents by this very token are blessed.

Shabbat 15b One violates Shabbat for the sake of a one-day-old baby, but not for the corpse of David, King of Israel.

Kohelet Rabba The accursed Emperor Hadrian was once walking along the road to Tiberias when he saw an old man standing and cutting down shrubs in order to plant saplings. He said to him, "Old man! Old man! What is your age?" He answered, "One hundred." "You are 100 years old and you stand here cutting down trees in order to plant saplings? Do you think you will eat of their fruits?" He replied, "If I am worthy, I shall eat: if not, just as my parents toiled for me, so shall I toil for my children."

Kiddushin 30a One who teaches a child Torah is considered to have taught that child and that child's children and grand children, to the end of the generations.

Sukkot 46b A person should not say to a child, "I will give you a thing" and not give it, for this teaches the child deceit.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah Rabbi Meir said: When the Israelites came to receive the Torah, G-d said to them, "Bring me good sureties that you will observe it." They answered, "Our ancestors shall be our sureties." G-d replied, "Your sureties need sureties themselves. I have found fault with them." They answered, "Our prophets shall be our sureties." G-d replied, "I have found fault with them also." Then the Israelites said, "Our children will be our sureties." They proved acceptable, and God gave Israel the Torah.

Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 119b By the breath of children G-d sustains the world.

Nedarim, 81a Take care of the children of the poor, for they will be the ones who advance knowledge.

Shabbat and the Child

In foretelling G-d's redemption of the people of Israel after their exile, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "All your children shall be disciples of the Lord, and great shall be their happiness."

But the Rabbis said: "The word should not be read 'children' (*banavikh*): it should rather be read 'builders' (*bonayikh*). For the children of a nation are the builders of its future".

From Celebrating Children Through the Year *by the Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC: The Children's Defense Fund, 1983.*

New Parchment

Little child, rocking the whole congregation,
Piping up blithely without reservation,
Little child, sweetly disrupting the service,
Heckling the rabbi, unyielding, unnervous,
Little child, summoning chuckles and banter,
Screeching off-key, to the joy of the cantor,
Little child, honoring us by your staying,
Lost in your own definition of praying,
Little child, though you now dent the decorum,
You are our future tenth Jew for the quorum.

From "Service for The Child," Caanan, by Rabbi Jim Kaufman, in Recognizing and Celebrating Children: Congregational Resources Volume II, *compiled by Congregations Concerned for Children.*

A Parent's Prayer for the Life of a Child

Wise parents, we know, are willing to let go. They are able to transfer authority to its proper source. They are fulfilled, not threatened, by the emerging maturity of their children.

May we let our child live his/her own life and not the one we wish we had lived. May we see today's missteps in perspective against the long road she/he must go. May we raise our voices more in happiness at what he/she is than in vexation at what he/she is not.

With love and concern we come into your life for a little while to help you live and grow. It is our hope and our prayer that we will know when that time is done. For then, with grace and respect, we must return to you what has been ours only in trust, that which has always been rightfully yours: yourself.

Blessed are you, our child, in the joy of your existence.
Blessed are we who have been enriched by your life.

Also from "Service for the Child," Caanan, by Rabbi Jim Kaufman.

The child who is part of a Shabbat family observance once a week, every week, learns about Jewish spiritual and ethical values.

The child whose family drops coins in a *tzedakah* box before lighting the candles to welcome Shabbat learns the value of sharing.

The child who learns to recite blessings over bread and wine, and thank G-d after the conclusion of a festive meal, learns that food is a gift from G-d.

The child who receives the traditional blessing from her or his parents as part of the Shabbat eve ritual begins to sense her or his importance as a link in the generations of Jewish people.

The child who learns to understand the Shabbat as a celebration and culmination of creation—the creation of G-d and the creation of humans—learns the values of work and rest.

The child who celebrates Shabbat as a reminder of the Exodus, freedom from slavery, learns about justice.

The child whose family welcomes Shabbat guests learns the value of hospitality.

The child who experiences an atmosphere of Shabbat Shalom, a peaceful Sabbath, appreciates the many meanings of peace: peace with oneself, peace in the home, peace with friends and neighbors, and peace in the world.

From In Celebration of Children: An Interfaith Religious Action Kit, *Children's Defense Fund, 1980.*

Sabbath Blessing

For a boy:

May G-d inspire you to live in the tradition of Ephraim and Manasseh, who carried forward the life of our people.

For a girl:

May G-d inspire you to live in the tradition of Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, who carried forward the life of our people.

For boys and girls:

May G-d bless you and guard you. May the light of G-d shine upon you, and may G-d be gracious to you. May the presence of G-d be with you and give you peace.

Sabbath Blessings for Children from Gates of Shabbat: A Guide for Observing Shabbat; *written by Mark Dov Shapiro, New York: The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1992.*

Rabbi's Blessing for a Child

Rabbi: May you live to see your world fulfilled, May your destiny be for worlds still to come,
All: and may you trust in generations past and yet to be.

Rabbi: May your heart be filled with intuition
All: and may your words be filled with insights.

Rabbi: May songs of praise ever be on your tongue,
All: and may your wisdom be on a straight path before you.

Rabbi: May your eyes shine with the light of holy words
All: and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.

Rabbi: May your lips ever speak wisdom
All: and your fulfillment be in righteousness even as you yearn to hear the words of the Holy Ancient One of Old.

Talmud Brachot 71a

3.

CHILDREN'S SABBATH ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

These suggestions can be used for religious school groups, Youth Groups, Sisterhood, or Men's Club meetings, or during a special time of celebration following the service, such as at a congregational meal or *oneg shabbat*.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL GROUPS AND YOUTH GROUPS:

- Discuss the Children's Sabbath with the children two or three weeks in advance. Talk about the meaning of the day, why you want to celebrate children, and why you want them to pray to G-d for the needs of all the nation's children. Tell them what the teachers and congregation are planning and what the students' roles will be. Ask them to think of ways they could take part or would like to celebrate. If parts in a service need to be assigned, decide which children will do what.
- A week or two in advance, have the children create a large banner to decorate the religious school rooms for the Children's Sabbath. See pages 10-14 for possible passages for the banner. Guide discussion on the meaning of the passages as they relate to children, before or during banner-making. Or, use the banner-making as an activity for the day of the Children's Sabbath itself.
- Have a children's work party clean and decorate the religious school room(s) before the Children's Sabbath.
- Use the children's artwork to decorate the building.
- Have young children decorate posters that are pre-printed with the slogan "Leave No Child Behind." Crayons, markers, or pictures cut from magazines can be used. Send the posters to elected officials in local, state, and national offices. Include a cover letter explaining the Children's Sabbath. Take a photograph of the children with their posters before you mail them. Display the photograph where your congregation will see it. If possible, have prints made for the children.
- Focus the religious school curriculum on Jewish attitudes toward children and social justice, as well as brief lessons concerning underprivileged children. Help the children come up with ideas of how to respond to those problems. Help them select and implement a feasible idea.
- Encourage the Temple Youth Group or United Synagogue Youth to devote one or more of its meetings to learning about the needs of children and what the group can do. (The National Federation of Temple Youth Groups' theme for 1992-1993 is children's issues.) You may want to use or adapt material from **Section 5: Information and Resources** found on pages 22-23.
- With the young people, create a list of ways they can act on behalf of children in the congregation, community, nation, or around the world. **Section 4: Follow-Up**

Actions for the Congregation and the action suggestions in **Section 5** may provide useful ideas. The list could include writing to legislators asking them what they are doing to meet the needs of children, volunteering at a children's shelter or day care center, tutoring, and working in a food pantry or emergency shelter. Check with programs in your area for some specific suggestions to offer the young people. After the list is created, provide ways for the group to volunteer, either together or individually.

- The children and young people could rehearse a skit, song, or poetry readings for the *oneg shabbat*.
- The children could help prepare the refreshments for the *oneg* or *kiddush*. If low-cost items are planned (such as cupcakes made and decorated by the children), commit the money saved to a children's program in the community. Help the children select the program to be the beneficiary. This may provide an opportunity to discuss Jewish perspectives on and the different meanings of *tzedakah* as giving donations and as doing justice.

ADULTS

- Organize an adult "Leave No Child Behind" forum. Invite persons from the congregation or the community to be on a panel to discuss the unmet needs of children and families in your community, state, and nation in the areas of health, early childhood education and development, or child poverty. Ask them to address the programs and policies that work to help children, and policies in need of change. Allow time for questions and answers. If possible, allow time to develop a plan of action based on what the group has learned.

  To secure speakers, consider contacting a representative from your community's hospital neonatal intensive care unit or health clinic to speak about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area; a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address his or her program and its needs; the director of a local child-serving program or an organization that works on behalf of children.
- Encourage young adult or singles groups to devote one or more of their meetings to learning about the needs of children and developing an active response.
- Encourage the Sisterhood, Men's Club, and Youth Group to plan an educational program, short-term study course, or series on the needs of children. Invite a speaker from a local child-serving program or organization advocating on behalf of children to address the group(s). Ask the speaker to end with suggestions of what the Sisterhood, Men's Club, or Youth Group could do to address the problem. Leave time for discussion of these possibilities and an action plan.
- Arrange a Children's Awareness Tour for members of your congregation. Arrange visits with public and private agencies concerned with children and families. Invite business and religious leaders, public officials, and members of the media to join you. Help participants consider how they can use their personal and professional roles to meet the needs of children. Write to the Children's Defense Fund and ask for information on the Child Watch and Child View '92 site visitation programs.

- Write to or telephone candidates' offices and ask for their position paper, or information, on children's issues. Make this information available to congregants.
- Invite candidates for public office to a forum to hear about the problems of children in your community and to talk about how they intend to work with you to address those problems.

All Ages

- Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a children's organization. Work with the Youth Group to plan and carry out the activity, and to select the organization to receive the donation. Build an educational component into the fund-raising activity. If it is a car wash or bake sale, for instance, work with the organization to create and then hand out flyers with information about the particular problem being addressed by the organization, and how the organization is helping. If the organization has volunteer or other needs, publicize that as well.
- As a Sunday School activity, plan for the children and adults to plant a tree outside the synagogue or in Israel to commemorate the Children's Sabbath. Consider developing a short ceremony based on the Kohelet Rabba passage on page 11 for the planting.

Suggestions for Sukkot

The following activities are designed to connect the Children's Sabbath with Sukkot:

- Decorate your *sukkah* with nonedibles (gourds, Indian corn, wild berries, peanut shell mosaics) to dramatize the problem of hunger, which afflicts one in eight children in the United States. Discuss the problem of childhood hunger, homelessness, and inadequate housing in an age-appropriate way with children and youths. Together, collect fruits, vegetables, and nonperishables, and donate them to a shelter serving homeless families or other programs serving children.
- Engage the entire congregation, parents, children, and teachers in building a mobile *sukkah* that can visit children (and adults) in hospitals and institutions.
- Make an effort to extend hospitality to single-parent families, families with foster children, and non-member families to share a meal in the *sukkah*.
- Deliver a sermon that connects Sukkot with children's needs. The holiday of Sukkot brings us out of our homes into the frail structure of the *sukkah* and reminds us of our own vulnerability and of the precarious situation facing vulnerable and dependent children.

Sukkot is also a harvest festival that reminds us of the many blessings that fill our lives — food, shelter, health, and freedom. We often take these things for granted, yet many people, a large percentage of whom are children, lack even these most basic necessities. By recalling G-d's protection and nurturing of the Israelites during their period of wandering in the desert, the holiday of Sukkot reminds us that no one should be deprived of these fundamental requirements.

During the season of Sukkot, the harvest ripens and is gathered in, and the promise of planting is fulfilled. The labor and care put into growing fruit and grain helps to

ensure a bountiful harvest; without careful attendance to the needs of the crops, they would not flourish. The flourishing of children, the relief of their suffering, and the fulfillment of their futures likewise require our labor and care. (Sermon notes written by David Rosen, formerly of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, for the "Keeping the Promise Campaign.")

Suggestions for Simchat Torah

The following activities are designed to connect the Children's Sabbath with Simchat Torah (October 20, 1992), if desired:

- During this celebration of learning, include — sensitively — a focus on the educational needs of the physically, mentally, and emotionally disabled children in the congregation and community.
- Help your Youth Group members begin a tutoring program for children with special needs. Encourage them to include these children in some of their social and religious programs.
- Hold a Jewish read-a-thon, to culminate in November's Jewish Book Month, in which children secure pledges from congregation members for each book they read. Use the read-a-thon to encourage young people to read books of Jewish interest. Propose designating the proceeds from their pledges to community programs serving children, perhaps by purchasing books for an after-school program serving low-income children or a shelter for homeless families.

4.

Follow-Up Actions for the Congregation

> G-d has shown you what is good;
> and what the Lord requires of you;
> Only to do justice and to love mercy
> and to walk humbly with your G-d
> *Micah 6:8*

The following range of suggestions is divided into three categories: *education* on the needs of children; *getting involved* in meeting these needs; and *advocacy* on behalf of children. The suggestions could be initiated, planned, and implemented by the rabbi(s), the social action committee, religious school teachers, the Sisterhood, Men's Club, or Youth Group, or by a new committee with representatives of these groups and other concerned individuals. Consider sharing copies of these suggestions with representatives of each group, and then arrange a time to discuss how the congregation or groups within it might commit to long-term action with and for children.

Education

- Write to Jewish educational resource centers and ask for their materials on and programs for children in the United States and around the world. Commit a shelf in your synagogue library to display materials on children in need and highlight possibilities for outreach and advocacy action. Recruit volunteers to update it regularly.
- If the Children's Sabbath observance did not include educational forums or meetings, set aside a future meeting date and invite a representative from a children's organization to speak to your congregation or a group within it about the needs of children and ways the congregation can help.
- Invite several congregants to write articles for the synagogue newsletter summarizing what they have learned about the needs of children. Consider asking a child, a youth, and an adult to write and share their unique perspectives on the Children's Sabbath observance and the issues it highlighted.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the unmet needs of women and children in your area and encourage strong local action.
- Research the needs of children in your community. Make a list of local child-serving organizations that are most in need of some form of assistance. Assess your congregation's resources (human, financial, and physical) and commit them, as appropriate, to fill an identified need of children.
- Find out what support services are available for children and families. Publicize their availability in the synagogue and in the community. If they are inadequate, team up with other religious or professional organizations in the community to establish support services.

- If the Children's Sabbath did not include a Children's Awareness Tour for the congregation (see page 16), plan a suitable date for one.

Getting Involved *(Gemilut Hasadim)*

- Consider donating congregational space to a program serving children, youths, and families or to an organization advocating on behalf of children. Consider Head Start or child care programs, parent support groups, and others.
- Maintain an updated listing of child-serving organizations with volunteer opportunities. Describe the skills, interests, and time required for each position, and encourage congregation members to reflect on how they would best like to help children: tutoring, fund raising, or lending professional skills such as nursing to an organization. Periodically publicize an organization's need in the synagogue newsletter.
- "Adopt" a child-serving organization, and provide a range of needed assistance from financial support, to donation of goods, to volunteering professional expertise in fund raising, promotion, or management.
- If your congregation is suitably located, sponsor free hearing and vision testing. Contact the local school board for information about clinics that administer these tests at public schools. Publicize the event to day care centers, shelters for homeless women and families, and in low-income neighborhoods. Or hold monthly "free doctor/dentist" days, utilizing members of your congregation and other religious groups participating. Publicize the days, times, and addresses in targeted areas.
- Organize a congregational or regional *mitzvah* corps among the teenagers in your synagogue. Establish a youth coordinating committee in your congregation to plan and implement the *mitzvah* corps.

Advocacy

> Tzedek! Tzedek!
> Justice! Justice shall you seek
> that you may live....
>
> *Deuteronomy 16:20*

- Monitor legislation affecting children and families, and inform your representatives of your views. Organizations such as the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Jewish Community Relations Council in your area, Interfaith IMPACT for Justice and Peace, and the Children's Defense Fund have information on pending legislation. Monitor the impact of the legislation on your community or state.
- Write the President and your Representative and Senators. Describe your concern about the state of children. Ask them what they will do to Leave No Child Behind and ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Ask for a reply. Write to:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

President _____
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

- Write your governor, state senator, state representative, and mayor, urging them to support effective federal, state, and local investments in children. State and local child advocacy organizations have information on legislation. Do your part in making sure programs for children are well implemented.
- Organize meetings with candidates, elected officials, and staff to learn more about their positions on children's issues and to provide them with information on the needs of children and how to meet those needs.

5.
INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

This section contains background information, reflection or discussion questions, and action suggestions for three areas: maternal and child health, early childhood development, and child and family poverty.

This material can be used:

- As background information for a sermon focusing on children,
- As the basis of an education program for the Sisterhood, Men's Club, or Youth Group, or
- To help the social action committee explore new directions for addressing the needs of children and families.

A HEALTHY START FOR EVERY CHILD

The Prophecy from Isaiah proclaims these promises of G-d: "For behold! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth....Never again shall be heard there the sounds of weeping and wailing. No more shall there be an infant or graybeard who does not live out his days." *(Isaiah 65:17a, 19b, 20a)*

Thousands of years ago, when this vision of G-d's new creation was recorded, many parents helplessly watched their babies die because they lacked the knowledge and resources to prevent the premature deaths of their children.

Today, too many parents still watch their babies die. Each year in America 40,000 babies die before reaching their first birthday, a rate worse than those of 19 other nations. And 400,000 children who do survive will be left with lifelong disabilities such as retardation, cerebral palsy, and vision, learning, and hearing disabilities.

Unlike in Isaiah's day, we have the knowledge and resources to prevent much of this suffering. A White House Task Force on infant mortality determined in 1989 that one in four of all U.S. infant deaths and disabilities is fully preventable with well-known and cost-effective health measures such as early, comprehensive prenatal care for pregnant women. Yet nearly 25 percent of all U.S. infants are born to mothers who do not receive care early in pregnancy.

America's children are falling behind the world's children in their access to health care and in their health status in other areas as well. Our children are less likely to be fully immunized against polio in infancy than children in 16 other nations. Our failure to invest in proven, preventive care incurs enormous moral, social, and economic costs. For instance, in addition to the incalculable toll in human suffering, the infant mortality gap between the United States and Japan costs our nation about $7 billion per year.

Why do America's pregnant women, infants, and children fail to get the preventive health care they need? One reason is that more than 30 million Americans live in communities where they have little access to basic health care. These are usually rural or inner-city areas without enough doctors or clinics. For example, the government's

studies show that the recent decline in immunization rates and the 16-fold increase in measles cases were caused by the rapidly shrinking access of American children to health services—not to parents' failure to use available services.

The second main reason is that millions of American children and their families have no health insurance. Between 9 million and 11 million children and 10.6 million women of childbearing age are completely uninsured. Millions of others have insurance that is inadequate, failing to cover essential services such as well-child visits, prenatal care, or immunizations.

Today, our nation has both the knowledge and the resources to prevent unnecessary child deaths, disabilities, and illness, as the prophet envisioned G-d's intention for a new creation. How can we participate in realizing that hopeful vision?

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How does the vision of G-d's new creation as recorded in Isaiah speak to the health of our nation's children today?
- What do you consider to be the moral costs of our nation's failure to provide preventive, affordable health care to all children? What are the social costs? What are the economic costs?
- Are we — as a faith community or as a nation — responsible for helping every child get a Healthy Start? Explain.
- What are some of the child health needs that your group knows are not being met in your community?
- What resources are available in your congregation to meet the health needs of children? Consider finances, volunteers, and facilities or equipment.
- Can you identify specific issues within child health that your group is interested in pursuing? How might you go about organizing an activity for your group or congregation?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child a Healthy Start?

We must make certain that all Americans have either private or public health insurance and that health care is available to children and their families wherever they may live. We must give *all* our children a good start in life, by guaranteeing that *all* mothers can get early, regular prenatal care and that *all* children can get the vaccines, the checkups, and the prompt treatment that will start them on the road to healthy development.

As a congregation or as one person of faith, we can participate in working toward a "new creation" of health and wholeness. We can:

Learn More

- Invite a representative from your community's hospital or health clinic to speak to your congregation about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area.
- Arrange a visit to a health clinic, Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) site, or neonatal intensive care unit, and find out what can be done to improve the health of children and families.

Reach Out

- Arrange to use the synagogue van or your private vehicle to transport pregnant women or parents and children to health appointments.
- Offer a prenatal care class through your synagogue.
- Donate synagogue space for immunization clinics.
- "Adopt" a health clinic and provide financial support and volunteers.
- Provide child care for children while their mothers go for prenatal care.

Speak Out

- Meet with people running for office. Tell candidates that children should be an important election year issue. Tell them *all* American children need a Healthy Start.
- Write and call legislators and candidates and ask them how they will meet child health needs.
- Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. You could ask questions such as:

  "What will you do to ensure that all young children are immunized fully?"

  "What steps would you support to ensure that all pregnant women have full access to prenatal care and that all children receive regular preventive health care and treatment?"
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. You can use the facts that you have learned today, or write to the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for free materials to help ensure that we Leave No Child Behind in this election year and insist that every child is given a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

A Head Start for Every Child

Listen to the joyful song of the psalmist: "For our sons are like saplings, well-tended in their youth; our daughters are like cornerstones, trimmed to give shape to a palace." *(Psalms 144:12)*

What kind of early childhood experiences and environment do the sons and daughters of our nation need to flourish as well-tended saplings, and to be as solid and stable as cornerstones of a palace?

In the infant and toddler years, a youngster needs good nutrition and health, a strong and nurturing family, and the varied and rich early childhood experiences that will encourage rather than stifle curiosity and eagerness to learn. By the time the child is three or four years old, some of those experiences are likely to be taking place outside the home, in a child care home or center or at a preschool, and those experiences as well should be safe, loving, and stimulating.

In 1990, recognizing that these early childhood experiences are crucial to success in school and after, President Bush and the governors named school readiness for all young children the first of six national education goals. Yet available indicators of the well-being of young children show how woefully far we are from reaching the goal.

Very modest investments during the early years have been shown to save much larger sums later. Every $1 spent on high quality preschool education saves an estimated $5.97 in later special education, crime, welfare, and other costs. Yet Head Start, which Congress and the Bush Administration promised to fund fully by 1994, had funding to serve fewer than one in three eligible children in 1991.

Our communities, our work places, and our nation offer little support for parents engaged in the extraordinarily difficult task of caring for young children. Unlike 16 other industrialized nations, including Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the United States has no family leave policy (paid or unpaid) to allow parents to stay home with an infant without jeopardizing their jobs and income.

Unlike those same nations, we have failed to ensure the availability of high quality, affordable child care. Although 61 percent of mothers with children ages three to five were in the labor force by the end of the 1980s, the National Research Council concluded in 1990 that "Poor...quality [child] care threatens children's development, especially children from poor and minority families."

Our continued failure to attend to the well-being of young children is not only a tragic waste of their potential, but a gamble with our nation's economic future. Among our major competitors, the United States stands out for its paucity of efforts to ensure that children enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure.

Head Start

Head Start is the successful preschool program for disadvantaged three- to five-year-olds that ideally should be available to every eligible child.

Experts in early childhood development say that Head Start's success in preparing children for productive lives is based on two important elements. First, the program is comprehensive. Recognizing that children who are undernourished or have untreated medical problems cannot learn efficiently, Head Start provides hot meals, immunization against childhood diseases, and screening and treatment for vision, hearing, and other medical and dental problems.

Second, Head Start supports children's healthy development by strengthening their families. Head Start teaches parents to see themselves as the primary teachers and advocates for their children. In addition, Head Start provides family counseling and referral to other community resources and government assistance programs, trains parent volunteers to work in the program, encourages them to continue their own education, and employs parents of students as more than one-third of its paid staff members.

The combination of comprehensive services and family involvement pays off for Head Start children. Research consistently shows that children who attend Head Start score higher on achievement tests and are more likely to meet the basic requirements for school than control groups. Once in school, Head Start graduates are less likely to be placed in special education classes or to be held back in school than other children from similar backgrounds.

And young adults who participated in preschool programs similar to Head Start are more likely than their peers to be literate and employed or enrolled in postsecondary education. They are less likely to be school dropouts, teen parents, dependent on welfare, or in trouble with the law.

Despite its record of success, Head Start never has received enough funding to both increase enrollments and cover rising costs. The landmark reauthorization of Head

Start in 1990 created the potential for yearly increases in Head Start enrollment (subject to appropriations by Congress) until the program is able to serve all eligible children starting in 1994, at a cost of $7.7 billion. The reauthorization also earmarked more money for quality improvements, including funds for staff training, established new criteria for classroom teachers, approved a new transition program to continue Head Start's comprehensive services for children after they enter school, and allowed funds to be used for full-day, full-year child care for Head Start students whose parents work.

For more information about Head Start, contact:

Children's Defense Fund
Child Care Division
25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

National Head Start Association
1220 King Street
Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- What are some of the factors that help children develop to their G-d-given potential, flourishing "like well-tended saplings"?
- What are some of the supports that help parents raise healthy, secure children?
- How does your congregation currently help provide positive early childhood experiences or support for parents?
- Is supporting and strengthening families an appropriate role for a faith community? Why or why not?
- What are some of the needs for early childhood or parent support programs in your congregation or community?
- What are some of the resources (human, financial, and in-kind) available in your group or in your congregation that might be directed to address early childhood needs or parent support?
- In which of the issues within early childhood development are group members most interested? How might you develop an activity for your group or congregation?

What Can We Do To Ensure Every Child a Head Start?

To ensure that all of our nation's children have a Head Start and enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure, we must commit ourselves to each of the steps required to meet that goal:

- Family leave policies that enable parents to care for an infant without jeopardizing the family's income;
- A place in Head Start for every eligible child, as promised by President Bush and Congress;
- High quality and affordable child care available in all communities for all children;
- Community programs that help support parents in providing a secure and stimulating environment for their children's development.

As a congregation or as individuals, to help give every child a Head Start, we can:

Learn More

- Visit a Head Start program, to see it in action. Arrange a time to talk with the teachers and parents, if possible, to learn about the program's strengths, as well as the existing barriers to its effectiveness. Find out what individuals or congregations can do to support the program and the children it serves.
- Invite a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address your congregation about his or her program and its needs.
- Learn more about community programs that support families (generally called family resource, family support, or parent education programs) by helping strengthen parents to meet the challenges of raising children and respond more fully to their children's needs. Determine if your congregation might support an existing program or help develop one.
- Contact the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009) and the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for more information on child care and Head Start programs and on pertinent legislation.

Reach Out

- Support a child care or Head Start program by volunteering or providing financial support or material goods. Or explore the possibilities of housing a Head Start program in your synagogue.
- Until there is adequate funding for full-day, full-year Head Start programs, explore how your synagogue might provide a supplementary after-school or summer program for Head Start students.
- Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a child care program, or set up a scholarship fund to help parents who cannot afford child care.
- Develop or house an after-school child care program or full-day child care program in your synagogue.

Speak Out

- Attend candidate forums and ask the candidates how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start. If they are candidates for state office, ask them what they believe your state should do to increase the availability of affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about the need for strong early childhood programs for every child and policies that support parents.
- Arrange to take candidates to visit Head Start or child care centers and to brief them on the need for available, affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs. Ask them how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start.

A Fair Start for Every Child

In Proverbs 31:8-9 we read "Speak up for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy." Who are "the poor and needy" today in our nation?

Infants and children are, in fact, the poorest Americans. More than 13.4 million American children — one out of every five — live in poverty.

The fact that children are the most common victims of poverty is not the only startling fact disproving widely held stereotypes about who is poor:

- Most poor families with children have at least one worker, and earnings from employment, not welfare, are their largest source of income.
- More poor children are white (5.9 million) than are black (3.7 million).
- More poor American children are living outside central cities than inside them.
- Nearly two-thirds of all poor families with children have only one or two children.
- And while single-parenthood drives up poverty rates, even if the United States had no children in single-parent families we would still have one of the highest child poverty rates among all industrialized societies.

Why Have So Many Children Become Poor?

The child poverty crisis is worsening, rather than getting better. In 1990 alone, 840,000 children were added to the ranks of the poor. From 1979 to 1990, the child poverty rate in this country increased more than one-quarter, adding more than 3 million children into poverty.

The declining effectiveness of government income programs in bringing families with children up above the poverty line accounted for *nearly half* of the increase in the poverty rate among families with children between 1979 and 1989. More than half of all government cash transfer payments (from programs such as Social Security, veterans benefits, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children) go to nonpoor families. Only $1 in every $12 of such payments in 1987 went to families with children that were poor or would have been poor in the absence of that government help. Government spending cuts during the 1980s also hurt poor families with children.

Changes in the job market that increased unemployment, lowered earnings, and left more workers unable to support their families were responsible for *almost one-third* of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children. For example, the minimum wage is worth less than 80 percent of its real (inflation-adjusted) 1979 value. As a result, full-time, year-round work at the minimum wage ($8,840) isn't nearly enough to bring a family of three above the poverty line (an estimated $10,723 in 1991).

The increase in the proportion of children living in single-parent families (a phenomenon in part driven by earnings declines) was the third but relatively smallest major force, contributing *about one-fourth* of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children.

Impossible Choices: A Group Exercise in Understanding Child and Family Poverty

In a group discussion of child poverty, distribute photocopies of the "Impossible Choices" box on page 30. Have a volunteer read aloud the first paragraph, which sets out a typical example of poverty as it affects a working family. Then ask group members to fill in the worksheet as you read the following information to them:

> "Working full-time, year-round at a job *above* the minimum wage yields you $824 per month. So on the blank line next to 'wages' on your worksheet, please fill in $824."

When group members have done so, read aloud the following:

> "The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that it costs $309 a month to provide a nutritionally adequate diet over the long term for a three-person family such as this. So, please fill in $309 on the blank line next to 'Food.'*"

When group members have done so, read the following:

> "In 1991 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-determined average Fair Market Rent for a modest, two-bedroom apartment in the United States was $510. The recommended limit for a family's housing costs is one-third of its income. By that calculation, this family should be living in housing that costs no more than $274 a month."

Have group members fill in the $510 HUD-determined figure for rent.* When group members have done so, ask them to fill in the blank next to child care with "$165" for the three-year-old (the 10-year-old stays with a neighbor after school), which is the average monthly cost of child care for one child.

Then, ask group members to fill in the "Subtotal" blank. This subtotal should be $984.

By comparing the "wages" figure ($824) and the basic expenses ($984), group members can see the difficulty of making ends meet for this parent who works full time. How do families such as this manage?

One potential source of income is child support. While state agencies are supposed to help collect child support payments from delinquent spouses, it's collected in fewer than one in three cases. In 1989, $5.1 billion in court-ordered child support went unpaid by absent parents. Have your group write "$0" next to child support.

Another source of support is the Earned Income Credit available to low-income working families on a *refundable basis*, meaning that working families such as this whose incomes are so low that they owe no federal taxes can receive a check for the credit. If the parent chooses, employers must add EIC benefits to regular paychecks. Tell group

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*Some group members may suggest that the three-person family could spend less on food or housing. Remind them that if they wish to skimp on food, resulting in a nutritionally inadequate diet, they may need to factor in later health costs. Likewise, if a group member believes the family could find cheaper housing, ask the group what some of the hidden costs of substandard housing might be (such as health costs and irreversible damage due to lead exposure).

Impossible Choices

You are the single parent of two children ages three and 10. You work full-time, year-round, at a job above minimum wage. Still, your earnings of $9,885 leave your family at the poverty line. Your employer does not provide health insurance. Your ex-spouse fails to provide court-ordered child support of $100 per month.

To understand the impossible choices facing poor families, decide how you would try to make ends meet:

Income		*Basic Expenses*	
Wages:	$_____ per month	Food:	$_____ per month
Child support:	$_____ per month	Rent & utilities:	$_____ per month
EIC:	$_____ per month	Child care:	$_____ per month
AFDC:	$_____ per month	Subtotal:	$_____ per month
Food stamps and housing assistance:	$_____ per month	**Surplus for all other expenses:**	
Subtotal:	$_____ per month	**$_____ per month**	

Family Needs Beyond Food and Shelter

The following are expenses for family needs beyond food, shelter, and child care. Which could you afford? Which would you forgo?

Selected household expenditures	*Average monthly expenditures of low-income* three-person households, 1988-1989*
Car upkeep/gas/public transportation	$142
Furniture/household equipment	48
Children's clothes	23
Adult clothes	39
Telephone	41
Health expenses	86
Housekeeping supplies	29
Educational expenses/reading	22
Insurance	16
Total	$446

* Income less than $20,000

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey. Calculations by the Children's Defense Fund.

members that this family's Earned Income Credit, per month, would be $102.91 (for an annual total of $1,235). Instruct them to fill in that figure on the line next to "EIC."

Inform them that many families that are eligible for this credit fail to obtain it because they do not know they are eligible, or they don't know how to complete the forms to get the credit.

(Optional: Select several group members to represent families that do not know about the Earned Income Credit or how to receive it. While everyone else is asked to add $102.91 to their monthly income, tell those persons selected to enter $0, to understand the impact of that lost benefit, and the need for community outreach to help eligible families receive it.)

Group members will see that this working family still will not be able to keep its head above water financially without additional support. Another source of support for some poor families is the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) grant. The size of AFDC grants vary by state. The nation's average maximum monthly AFDC benefit for a three-person family in January 1992 was $372.

To see if this family is eligible for AFDC, food stamps, or housing assistance and how much money they would receive in your state, call your state welfare department. If this family is eligible for any of these benefits in your state, tell group members to fill in the amount the family would receive on the appropriate line next to AFDC or food stamps and housing assistance. If this family does not meet your state's "standard of need," leave the line(s) blank. Tell the group that nationwide the average poor family with children got only $141 in food and housing benefits a month in 1989.

Ask group members now to subtotal their income, and subtract their basic expenses and child care costs from that subtotal. After arriving at a figure, the group should fill in the amount on the line next to "Surplus for all other expenses."

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How did you feel when you learned that children are the most common victims of poverty? Which fact surprised you the most?
- How do you think our society's misconceptions about who is poor affect our response?
- What responsibility do you feel to "Speak out for those who cannot speak"? What responsibility do you believe our nation has to "defend the rights of the poor and needy"?
- What would be the hardest aspect of being a working parent who is only able to keep your family teetering on the brink of the poverty line?
- How would you try to manage if you were this parent? Which expenses would you have to forgo or cut back? What might be the hidden costs of spending less on food, housing, child care, or health care?
- What might be the impact of one illness, such as an ear infection?
- If you were this parent, what would be the greatest help or support for which you would hope?
- What are some of the poverty-related problems that you see facing children in your community or throughout the state?

- What resources are available in your congregation to meet the needs of poor children and families? For example, finances, volunteers, and facilities or equipment.
- Can you identify specific issues within child poverty that your group is interested in pursuing? If so, how might you go about organizing an activity?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child a Fair Start?

It is essential to this nation's moral and economic future that we eliminate child poverty, a goal well within our reach by the year 2000. As a nation, it is time to honor our pro-family rhetoric with action by providing a floor of support under every child, through:

- Decent wages and job opportunities;
- An adequate refundable child tax credit and other refundable tax credits;
- Child support guarantees;
- Parental leave policies.

As a congregation or as one person, we can raise our voices on behalf of our nation's children who are voiceless and powerless in the halls of government.

Learn More

- Know the facts about child poverty in your community, state, and the nation. The Children's Defense Fund has information and resources to help you both learn about and address the needs of children through education, outreach, and public policy advocacy.
- Visit a local program that serves low-income children and families. Ask the service providers what problems they see facing children and families. Ask what they need to serve the children better — financial support, volunteers, donation of goods, and changes in public policies.

Reach Out

- Provide support to a local program that serves low-income children and families by volunteering, making a financial donation, or providing needed items.
- Participate in the Earned Income Credit community outreach project to help eligible low-income working families learn about and obtain this credit. For more information, write to: The 1992 Earned Income Credit Campaign, The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 777 N. Capitol St., N.E., Suite 705, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 408-1080.

Speak Out

- Speak out about public policies on the local, state, and federal level that affect children and families. Contact your movement's public policy office, an ecumenical organization such as INTERFAITH IMPACT for Justice and Peace, or the Children's Defense Fund Office of Religious Affairs for information to help you advocate on behalf of children and families.
- Attend candidate forums and ask candidates how they will ensure that every child has a Fair Start. Additional questions might be:

"How do you propose to reduce childhood poverty in America?"

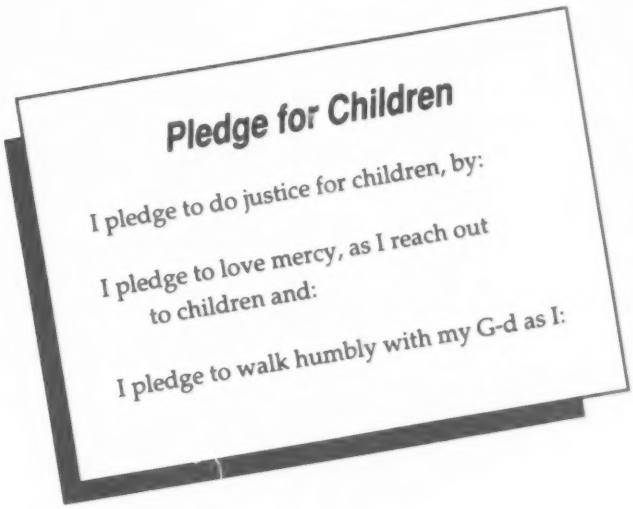
"Will you work to ensure that any congressional tax relief proposal includes a refundable tax credit that will benefit *all* families with children?"

"What steps would you take to ensure that custodial parents receive the child support payment to which they are entitled?"

- Arrange a "site visit" to take candidates to visit programs that are serving poor children and families, as well as to sites that demonstrate the need for stronger leadership and improved policies to help poor children and families, such as neonatal intensive care units where two-pound babies reveal the costs of our nation's failure to invest in prenatal and preventive health care for all pregnant women and children.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about child poverty and urging strong action from every sector of the community — from government to business to media to the religious community.

ORDER *FREE* POSTCARDS FOR YOUR CONGREGATION!

Involve your congregation in helping America's children! Multiple copies of two Pledge for Children postcards are available *free* from the Children's Defense Fund. Use the Rabbi Response Form on page 37 to order.

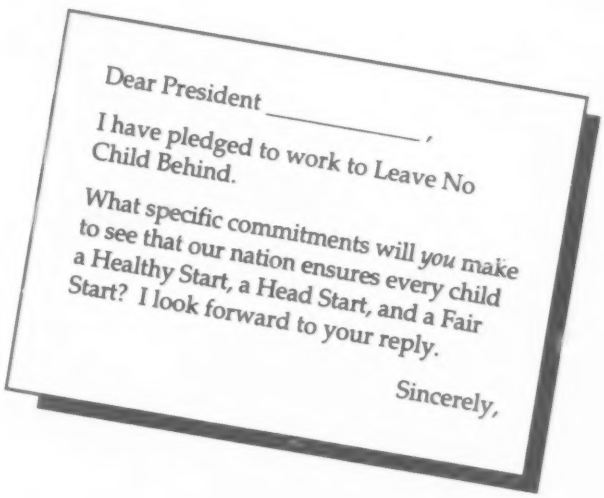

Pledge for Children
I pledge to do justice for children, by:
I pledge to love mercy, as I reach out to children and:
I pledge to walk humbly with my G-d as I:

PLEDGE FOR CHILDREN

Make a pledge of commitment to the children in your congregation, community, and nation. Keep the pledge portion of the card to remind you how to plan to do justice for children, love mercy, and walk humbly with G-d. Send the other portion of the card in for additional information about what *you* can do for America's children!

TO THE PRESIDENT-ELECT

Let the President-Elect know that you have made a Pledge for Children, and ask what he will do to make sure our nation leaves no child behind! Send the postcard back to the Children's Defense Fund – we'll deliver thousands to the White House from congregants across the country at the start of the new presidential term.


Dear President _____,
I have pledged to work to Leave No Child Behind.
What specific commitments will *you* make to see that our nation ensures every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start? I look forward to your reply.
Sincerely,

RESOURCES:
ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

ORGANIZATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS SOCIAL ACTION

Children's Defense Fund
Office of Religious Affairs
25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

Interfaith IMPACT for Justice and Peace
100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 543-2800

National Council of Jewish Women–
Center for the Child
53 W. 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 645-4048

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 387-2800

PUBLICATIONS

Concern Into Action: An Advocacy Guide for People of Faith, Tina Clarke. Washington, DC: Interfaith IMPACT, 1990.

Congregations and Child Care: A Self-Study for Churches and Synagogues and Their Early Childhood Programs, Dorothy M. Steele, ed. Available from the Child and Family Justice Office, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015, 1990.

From Tzedek to Tzedakah: Economic and Social Issues of Concern for Women and Children, Rabbi Marla J. Feldman. New York: National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 1985.

Person to Person: A Personalized Synagogue Social Action Project, a program developed at Temple Emanuel. Kensington, MD: Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.

Recognizing and Celebrating Children: Congregational Resources Volumes I and II, prepared by Congregations Concerned for Children, 1990 and 1992. Available from CCC, 122 W. Franklin Avenue, #218, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

Social Action Manual: A Practical Guide for Organizing and Programming Social Action in the Synagogue, Rabbi David Saperstein, ed. New York: UAHC for the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 1983.

The State of America's Children 1992. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1992.

Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage, Lisbeth Schorr. New York: Anchor Press, 1988.

RABBI RESPONSE FORM

❑ **Yes,** I would like _____ (quantity) of the Pledge for Children postcards, free of charge. Please send them to:

Name _____

Synagogue _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Telephone _____

❑ My congregation will be conducting Children's Sabbath activities on:

_____
(date)

We plan to:

- ❑ Focus the service on children's issues through the sermon, prayers, or other: _____
- ❑ Involve children and youths more fully in the service.
- ❑ Use the Pledge for Children postcard.
- ❑ Have special congregational activities, including: _____

  _____
- ❑ Use the bulletin/newsletter inserts or news release.
- ❑ Develop long-term follow-up activities.
- ❑ Hold a Sisterhood/Men's Club/Youth Group meeting on children's issues.
- ❑ Other: _____

  _____

  _____

Please remove this page and mail it in an envelope to: Religious Affairs, Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Order postcards early to be sure you have them in time for your Children's Sabbath activities!

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Washington, DC

"Hear Their Cry"

A Catholic Guide for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

Children's Defense Fund

PS 021106

About CDF

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor, minority, and disabled children. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble.

CDF is a unique organization. CDF focuses on programs and policies that affect large numbers of children, rather than on helping families on a case-by-case basis. Our staff includes specialists in health, education, child welfare, mental health, child development, adolescent pregnancy prevention, family income, and youth employment. CDF gathers data and disseminates information on key issues affecting children. We monitor the development and implementation of federal and state policies. We provide information, technical assistance, and support to a network of state and local child advocates, service providers, and public and private sector officials and leaders. We pursue an annual legislative agenda in the U.S. Congress and litigate selected cases of major importance. CDF's major initiatives include our adolescent pregnancy prevention program and a prenatal care and child health campaign. CDF educates hundreds of thousands of citizens annually about children's needs and responsible policy options for meeting those needs.

CDF is a national organization with roots in communities across America. Although our main office is in Washington, D.C., we reach out to towns and cities across the country to monitor the effects of changes in national and state policies and to help people and organizations concerned with what happens to children. CDF maintains state offices in Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas; and local project offices in Marlboro County, South Carolina; the District of Columbia; Cleveland-Cuyahoga County, Ohio; and New York City. CDF has developed cooperative projects with groups in many states.

CDF is a private nonprofit organization supported by foundations, corporate grants, and individual donations.

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Contents

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman 1

1. Organizing Suggestions 4
   - Planning a Children's Sabbath 4
   - Some Ideas for Promotion 4
   - Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: Every Sunday Morning... 5
   - Newsletter/Bulletin Insert: A Day in the Lives of America's Children 7
   - Sample News Release 8

2. Suggestions and Resources for the Liturgy 9
   - Involving Children and Youths 9
   - Liturgical Resources (Sample General Intercessions) 9
   - A Catholic Orientation to Preaching on Children 13
   - Homily Notes for Ordinary Time 29 14
   - Sample Children's Homily 15

3. Activity Suggestions 17
   - Children and Youths 17
   - Adults 18
   - All Ages 19

4. Follow-Up Suggestions 20
   - Education 20
   - Service 21
   - Advocacy 22

5. Background Information 23
   - A Healthy Start for Every Child 23
   - A Head Start for Every Child 25
   - A Fair Start for Every Child 29

Appendix 35
- Pledge for Children (Postcards) 35
- Resources for Faithful Child Advocacy 36
- Response Form 38

A Message from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Faithful Child Advocate:

I invite you to join me and hundreds of thousands of others across our nation in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths on October 16, 17, and 18, 1992.

The religious community can and must be a prophetic voice and presence, actively leading our nation to live out the ideals of compassion and justice. We must ensure that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

In 1992 the nation's Catholic bishops have launched a Catholic Campaign for Children and Families. We hope that Catholic participation in the National Children's Sabbath can be a part of parish activities and commitment to the campaign. These materials are meant to supplement the *Parish Resource Manual* for the Catholic Campaign. The Children's Defense Fund is grateful for the use of these materials and for permission to reproduce materials from the U.S. Catholic Conference's *Respect Life 92* manual.

In this election year, as our nation sets its priorities for the next four years, it is important to call attention to the vulnerable young faces of children living in poverty. Our nation allows children to be the poorest Americans, depriving more than 13 million children of the opportunity to develop their potential. This needless tragedy of child poverty in our rich nation signals a loss of our national vision and priorities. Family and community values and supports are disintegrating, reflecting the spiritual as well as economic poverty permeating our nation. No fact tells us more clearly that something is badly awry in America than the reported abuse or neglect in 1990 of an American child every 13 seconds. It is time to see that we Leave No Child Behind.

What Is the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths?

Beginning with Shabbat services on Friday, October 16, and concluding with church services on Sunday, October 18, congregations across our nation will focus worship services, religious education, and congregational activities on the needs of children and how the religious community can help to meet those needs. It is our hope that the National Observance will catalyze thousands of persons into new, long-term commitments to act on behalf of children.

These Children's Sabbaths will lift a united voice of concern for the children of our nation, explore the faith-based imperative to speak out on behalf of the vulnerable, and encourage a commitment to help children through education, service, and advocacy.

Why Is the Children's Defense Fund Coordinating the Observance?

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation who cannot vote, lobby, or speak out for themselves. Our goal is to educate the nation about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble.

Since 1981 CDF has worked in partnership with the religious community to bring about change for poor and vulnerable children. The 1992 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is born out of the growing religious movement for children and aims to coalesce this concern and involvement in a united moral voice for children.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths has been endorsed by the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and a wide range of denominations and councils of churches. The Most Reverend James W. Malone, Bishop of Youngstown, and the Most Reverend Rembert Weakland, Archbishop of Milwaukee, serve on the Advisory Committee for the National Observance.

How Can Your Parish Participate?

Parishes can participate in a variety of ways, depending on interests, resources, and time. Ideas and suggestions in this packet include:

- Suggestions and resources for the Sunday liturgy (pages 9-16)
- Photocopy-ready bulletin inserts (pages 5-7);
- A sample news release (page 8);
- Activity suggestions for religious education, and adult, singles, and youth groups (pages 17-19);
- Follow-up suggestions to extend your parish's involvement in meeting the needs of children (pages 20-22).

PLEASE DON'T BE DAUNTED BY THE LENGTH OF THE MATERIALS! We have provided a broad variety of resources and suggestions so that you can pick and choose those that are appropriate for your parish.

Your parish's participation could be as simple as using a bulletin insert and distributing the Pledge for Children card, or as extensive as focusing the Sunday liturgy, religious education, and parish activities on children. How much you do is less important than doing *something* — that you respond to this opportunity to join with thousands of congregations in renewing and expanding our commitment to meeting the needs of children and families.

We have provided a variety of materials, many of which require little time to use. Still, October 18 may not be a good date for your parish's observance of a Children's Sabbath. If so, I encourage you to plan one for a more suitable date. Most of these materials can be used any time.

Does Celebrating a Children's Sabbath Really Make a Difference?

The Children's Sabbaths held in Twin Cities congregations over the past few years have raised the awareness of members about the needs of children and have connected this new awareness with members' faith through homilies and prayer. The deep faith basis has motivated these persons to take action on legislative issues for children either in the liturgy or just after it. These faithful child advocates now provide sustained action for children in need. Just one example of an area parish committed to children's issues is St. Francis Cabrini, which recently celebrated a Children's Sabbath with a homily on a theology of children and an offering of letters on children's health care.

A Children's Sabbath *does* make a difference.

Please join us for this very special weekend of celebrating the children in our parishes, community, and nation. Help us to lift up their needs, and respond more fully to address them. Now more than ever, the children of our nation need us to reach out to them with compassion and speak out for justice on their behalf. The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is the beginning (or, for many, the continuation) of what I hope will be an ongoing relationship with you as we seek to lift the needs of children to the top of our communities' and nation's agenda. Our Religious Affairs Coordinator, Shannon Daley, works full-time to provide resources and assistance for the religious community. She is eager to support you and your parish's faithful advocacy for children.

Thank you for all that you do, and will do, on behalf of children.

In faith,

Marian Wright Edelman
President
Children's Defense Fund

1.
Organizing Suggestions

Planning a Children's Sabbath

Try to involve the parish and perhaps recruit a committee to plan the activities leading up to and following this special liturgy. Invite children and young people to join in.

Choose the components of your observance. In addition to the liturgy, you might plan activities during religious education (for adults and youths); coffee hour/ fellowship time; and women's, men's, singles', or youth group meetings. You may also plan activities for Saturday, October 17, or use the Children's Sabbath to kick off an education series on the needs of children. After you have determined the basic range of activities, recruit volunteers to assist.

Before or after the Children's Sabbath, convene the planning committee, representatives of the social action committee, women's, men's, singles', and youth groups, religious education, and other interested persons. Discuss building on the Children's Sabbath to develop long-term responses to the needs of children and families. **Section 4: Follow-Up Suggestions** may provide a useful starting point for discussion.

Some Ideas for Promotion

- Include announcements in your parish newsletter or bulletin.
- Place the bulletin insert, included in this booklet on pages 5-6, in your parish bulletin or newsletter several weeks in advance of the actual service.
- Display posters announcing the Children's Sabbath (perhaps created as a church school activity) throughout the church.
- Adapt the sample news release on page 8 for the religious affairs section of the local newspaper.

The following three pages may be clipped out and duplicated for newsletter or bulletin inserts. Copy page 7 for a one-page insert. Photocopy pages 5 and 6 back-to-back on one sheet of 8-1/2" x 11" paper and fold in the middle for a ready-made four-page insert.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND?

Each person of faith must do three things to help children:

1. Register and vote. Children can't vote. They can't hold politicians to campaign promises. But *you* can.

2. Ask candidates what they have done and will do for children. Tell them *all* American children need a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Write and call legislators and candidates. Meet with people running for election. Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. Write a letter to the editor. You can use the facts in this insert.

3. Learn more about what children need and about what already is working to meet their needs. Don't let anybody tell you that "nothing works." Visit good local groups that help children. Contact the Children's Defense Fund for information about its Child Watch and Child View '92 site visitation programs. And send in the form below for more information.

I WANT TO HELP!

❑ *Yes!* Please sign me up for the campaign to **Leave No Child Behind**. Tell me more about what I can do.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, state, zip: _____

Daytime phone: _____

Parish (optional): _____

Complete this form and mail in an envelope to: The Children's Defense Fund, Leave No Child Behind, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Every Sunday ... as

we wake up, 100,000 American children wake up homeless. ❧ **Every 32 seconds ...** about the time it takes us to say the Lord's Prayer ... an American baby is born into poverty. ❧ **Every 14 minutes ...** while we listen to the homily ... a baby dies in America. ❧ **Every 64 seconds ...** while we "pass the peace" ... a baby is born to a teenage mother. ❧ **And every 13 hours ...** before we go back to sleep each night ... an American preschooler is murdered.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND™

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Defense Fund

25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

99

Then [Jesus] took a little child
and put it among them; and taking it in his
arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes
one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me
but the one who sent me."

Mark 9:36-37

Today, the tragic reality is that too many of our nation's children are not being "welcomed" but instead are being left behind. Too many don't have the education, health care, homes, strong communities, and family supports they need to develop to their God-given potential.

WHAT DO AMERICA'S CHILDREN NEED TO DEVELOP TO THEIR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL?

They need every one of us to act for them before even one more child is left behind. *All* children need and deserve:

- **A Healthy Start** – basic health care for every child and pregnant woman.

- **A Head Start** – good quality preschool and child care to help them get ready for school, keep up in school, and prepare for the future.

- **A Fair Start** – jobs at decent wages, assured child support, and a refundable tax credit for families with children so that no child is homeless or hungry or so poor that he or she is left behind.

WE *CAN* ACT TO PROVIDE HOPE FOR OUR CHILDREN AND LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

We know how to nurture and raise healthy, well-educated, hopeful children. We know that investing in programs that work prevents suffering and saves money.

We know that Head Start, quality child care, prenatal care for pregnant women, and preventive health care for children all work, and make a difference in children's lives. Every dollar invested in these programs can save $3 to $10 in later health, special education, and other costs.

HOW DO WE MAKE IT HAPPEN?

"For generations, the Catholic community has reached out to children – to welcome them into our faith, to teach them, to serve their spiritual growth, and to offer food, shelter, and help at times of need." ("Putting Children & Families First," USCC) Now, in this election year 1992, we have an important new opportunity to answer Christ's call.

We can do a lot in our own parishes and communities by volunteering time to help children or donating money to programs and people who work for children. But if we want to make sure no child is left behind, we also have to tell our elected leaders and those who ask for our votes that *they* have to work for children, too.

As believers and citizens, we need — each of us — to use our values, voices, and votes to hold our public officials accountable and to shape a society that puts our children first.

"Putting Children & Families First," U.S. Catholic Conference

A Day in the Lives of America's Children

Every day in America:

2,685	babies are born into poverty.
638	babies are born to mothers receiving late or no prenatal care.
742	babies are born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds).
107	babies die before their first birthday.
2	children younger than five are murdered.
248	children are arrested for violent crimes.
176	children are arrested for drug abuse.
427	children are arrested for alcohol abuse or drunk driving.
10,988	public school students are suspended each school day.
2,250	students ages 16 to 24 drop out each school day.

Beginning with Jewish Shabbat services on Friday, October 16, and concluding with church services on Sunday, October 18, thousands of congregations across our nation will be participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. The National Observance is intended to lift up the needs of children and families in our nation and involve congregations in responding to these needs.

Our parish plans to participate!

Date: _____

Time: _____

To learn more about what our parish is planning, and how you can become involved, contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Children's Defense Fund

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information,
contact [name]
[telephone number]

[PARISH] JOINS NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS

[Name of your TOWN, STATE] - On October 18, 1992, [name of parish] will be participating in a National Observance of Children's Sabbaths designed to focus attention on the crises afflicting children and families in the United States. The National Observance has been endorsed by the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of America, and a wide range of denominations and religious organizations. Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee and Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown are members of the National Advisory Committee for the Children's Sabbath. The National Observance is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that exists to provide a strong and effective voice for the children of our nation.

Children are the poorest Americans; one out of every five is living in poverty. More than 9 million children in a range of economic circumstances lack health insurance, unable to get care as basic — and vital — as preventive health care checkups and immunizations. Strong early childhood development, through Head Start programs and quality child care and preschool, is out of the reach of more than 1 million three-, four-, and five-year-olds because of inadequate local, state, and federal investments.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths aims to highlight the growing problems facing children in the United States and to involve the religious community in responding to these problems through public education, direct service, and public policy advocacy. Thousands of congregations across the nation will be focusing their worship services, religious education, and congregational activities on children throughout the weekend. An anticipated outcome of the National Observance is that thousands of persons will make a new, long-term commitment to act on behalf of children through their own congregation or in partnership with child-serving organizations in their community.

[Name of parish] plans to join in the National Observance by [briefly describe plans for your Children's Sabbath].

For more information about [name of parish's] celebration for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, contact: [name, address of parish, telephone].

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2.
Suggestions and Resources for the Liturgy

- Focus the homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf. Homily suggestions can be found on page 13-15. **Section 5: Background Information** outlines the state of children in our nation.
- Use or adapt the sample Children's Homily on page 15.
- Name specific needs of children during the General Intercessions. Sample intercessions can be found on pages 10-12.
- Invite parishioners to fill out the special Pledge for Children postcards. A description is provided on page 35, along with ordering information for multiple copies, free of charge.
- Collect a special offering to benefit a program serving children or families (such as a Head Start center, health clinic, or after-school program for low-income children). In advance, ask families to plan their contribution: new or used toys and books, a financial donation, or outgrown clothes in good condition. Encourage parents to discuss children in need and to prepare the children for the Children's Sabbath.
- Highlight children's needs in the bulletin. Use the bulletin insert found on page 7.

Involving Children and Youths

The church school classes and youth groups could:

- Greet worshipers as they arrive in or leave the sanctuary.
- Sing a special hymn.

Liturgical Resources

Penitential Rite

Priest/Deacon: Lord Jesus, you gathered the little children to yourself. Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Priest/Deacon: Lord Jesus, you are the hope of all generations. Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Priest/Deacon: Lord Jesus, you called us to welcome children in your name.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Priest/Deacon: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Sample General Intercessions

Priest: For the millions of children who are living in poverty, that they might receive the basic necessities to develop their potential, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: For the children who cried themselves to sleep last night with stomachs tight with hunger, that they be nourished and comforted, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: For the children who will tuck themselves into bed tonight, while their parents burrow into briefcases or newspapers, that families make time to enjoy and celebrate each other, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: For the parents who struggle to make ends meet, find jobs, and clothe and feed their families, that they might find support and compassion, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: For those in positions of power, that their hearts will not be that of the unjust judge, but instead be moved by your mercy and justice, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: For ourselves, that we are moved from complaisance about poverty and that we find the faithful persistence of the widow to challenge injustice, let us pray to the Lord.

People: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Priest: Hear, O God, the prayers of your people. Help them to share your loving care with all who need your protection. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

People: Amen.

General Intercession

(The following intercessions should be adapted to include the local community's needs.)

Priest: My sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, as a consecrated people we are called to intercede for the life of the world. Let us bring our petitions this day before the mercy seat of God.

Minister: That all who call on the name of Jesus may form one holy Church committed to the opposition of violence and war, oppression, and destruction of life, let us pray to the Lord.

R. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

That the Spirit, who descended upon Jesus at the Jordan, will fill and inspire the minds and hearts of all who lead us in civil government, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That God will raise up in our times courageous prophets whose teaching and preaching will turn the hearts of all men and women to the generous love and protection of children, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That our God, who restores nations and brings back exiles, may give to our nation a new sense of commitment to justice and peace, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That the Lamb of God, who takes away our sins, may be a source of healing for all afflicted in body, mind, and spirit, especially (names), let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That Christ, the Light of the nations, will lead into his eternal glory all who have died in the hope of the resurrection, especially (names), let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

Priest: Hear, O God, the prayer of your people.
Restore us in your sight, and bring us back to the full glory of your reign.
Turn the hearts of all who need your light.
Make us servants for the life of the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. **Amen.**

General Intercessions on Respect Life Themes *

(The following intercessions should be adapted to include the local community's needs.)

Children and Families First

Priest: Moved by the example of Jesus' particular love and concern for children, let us intercede before the God and Father of us all for the needs of every human family.

Minister: That the freshness of life we discover in children may encourage us in our efforts to establish God's peace and justice on earth, let us pray to the Lord.

R. **Lord, hear our prayer**

That the innocence of children may inspire in every human heart the desire to work for the support and protection of family life, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That the sense of wonder which fills the eyes and hearts of God's little ones may lead every person to greater reverence for God's creation, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

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That a child's sense of delight at God's good creation may fill every heart and home with a spirit of thanksgiving this day, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

That a child's openness to receiving our gifts may open our hearts to every gift of life which comes to us from God's love, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

Priest: O God, you are the source of all life. Shelter and defend every child given into our care.

Make every family a temple of your loving presence so that the family of humanity, spread throughout the world, may praise and glorify you forever. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. **Amen.**

Children

Priest: The love of God is made manifest in the Word made flesh and revealed as God's own child. As brothers and sisters of Jesus let us bring before the source of all life our special prayer for all children.

Minister: For a world of peace, where children may live without fear and be loved in security, let us pray to the Lord.

R. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For families of harmony and concord, where children may learn deep reverence for life and committed love, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

For churches of authentic prayer and common life, where children may be nurtured in faith, hope, and love, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

For schools of safety and wisdom, where children may grow in wisdom and knowledge and commitment to the good of all, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

For cities and streets free of violence and safe for the play of every child, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

For forests and fields, oceans and streams, where all God's children may revel in the wonders of nature which mirror God's beauty, let us pray to the Lord. **R.**

Priest: Gentle God,
let us see your face
in the faces of children.
Help us to shape the future
you open before us.

Assist us to protect the bright promise which is ours
in the freshness of every young life.
May our attention to the needs of the young
enable them to join in our praise of your name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. **Amen.**

A Catholic Orientation to Preaching on Children

The Roman Catholic Church shares with other Christian churches a common lectionary or cycle of scripture readings. The weekend of October 17-18, 1992, is the twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary time and the readings are Ex. 17:8-13, Ps. 121:1-8, 2 Tim. 3:14 - 4:2, Mk. 18:1-8. These readings present their own challenge for the themes of the Children's Defense Fund.

However, in the Roman Catholic tradition in the United States the third Sunday in October is Mission Sunday and because this year is the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of the Americas, there is a rare exception given to substitute scripture readings from those "For the Spread of the Gospel," nos. 816-820 in the lectionary. Suggested are Is. 60:1-8, Rom. 10:9-18, and Mt. 28:16-20. These readings and the theme of God's universal saving intentions more readily lend themselves to the theme of children. In fact, the American bishops are suggesting preaching on the Sundays of Advent and Christmastide on their "Putting Children and Families First" statement of last year. To focus Mission Sunday on the needs of our children locally, nationally, and around the world seems just right.

The Parish Resource Manual, *Children and Families First*, is available from the United States Catholic Conference at $4.95 in both English and Spanish editions (USCC Publishing Services, 3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194, 1-800-235-8722). It is loaded with resources for parishes including preaching resources from the Woodstock Theological Center's *Preaching the Just Word* project, founded by Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., and coordinated by the Rev. Raymond B. Kemp (Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057-1097, 202-687-4223).

An excerpt from Father Burghardt's homily in the USCC resource (pages 73-74) will give you an orientation to preaching about children:

> ...But how did God manifest Godself in Christ? As a child.... The Son of God was born as we are, came from a mother's body, became what each of us grownups once was...
>
> But the Christ child raises a problem. Pope John Paul II put it bluntly: "...in the Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord himself," the Lord who asserted, "whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt. 18:5). For all too many of the world's children, there is "no room at the inn" (Lk. 2:7). In the next 60 seconds, 27 children under five will die in developing countries — almost 40,000 each day. And they will die mostly from diseases we know how to prevent — measles, diarrhea, respiratory infections. In this decade, the 90s, at present rates, do you how many children will die needlessly? 150 million....
>
> ...If you take the latest available data in six categories — infant mortality, child abuse, children in poverty, teenage suicide, teenage drug abuse, and high school drop-outs — in our land of power and prosperity their social well-being reached a new low in 1987, "the worst year for children in two decades."

... Before we can bask in God's glory, we must scatter some of the gloom that envelopes our world, repent of the injustice to children that challenges our lifestyle, take as spoken to us the ageless question Yahweh addressed through Isaiah to the Jews:

> Is not this the fast that I choose:
> to loose the bonds of wickedness,
> to undo the thongs of the yoke,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> and to break every yoke? (Is. 58:6)

What the Children's Defense Fund makes known about the state of children in this country and in our world cannot be left to the bookshelf or to the press releases. It can be used so effectively by preachers to enliven both our homilies and our congregations by sharpening the two-edged sword that is God's Word and thereby rendering it more fruitful. Children embody both our hope and our horror as we minister. The hope and the horror will be turned into the holy by our action for the life of our children.

Rev. Raymond B. Kemp
Preaching the Just Word
Woodstock Theological Center
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20012

Homily Notes for Ordinary Time 29

Psalm 119:137-144
Exodus 17:8-13
2 Timothy 3:14-4:2
Luke 18:1-8

Exegesis: The theme connecting the first reading (Ex. 17:18-13) and gospel (Lk 18:1-8) is perseverance in advocacy for God's people. In Exodus, Moses pleads with God for the people of Israel. The widow in the gospel parable pleads for justice for her family. Luke clearly applies the parable to perseverance in prayer (vv. 1, 7), but it is also legitimate to see in the widow's behavior, as in Moses' intermediary role, models of advocacy on behalf of children and families.

The precarious status of the widow in ancient Israel might also provide occasion to comment on the needs of single-parent families today. Her successful strategy in winning justice from the hard-hearted, perhaps corrupt judge, is Jesus' testimony to the drive and imagination with which single mothers must struggle for justice in our society. Her persistence, of course, is a virtue for all parents and advocates of children.

The widow's determination is one of several virtues Luke identifies in chapter 18 with admission to the Kingdom. Others include the humility of the publican, the openness of children, and voluntary poverty. The success of the woman's "tough-love" strategy might also be a model of the steadiness of purpose needed to create a loving home for children or to labor over years to construct a society "safe for our children and other living things."

The homilist should not neglect the theological moral of the parable (v. 7): "Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night...?" In the biblical

perspective, God is the "father of orphans," the advocate who hears and answers the cries of his little ones and of those who plead for them.

Liturgical Cycle: The Children's Sabbath falls in the last weeks of Ordinary Time. The selections for Luke's gospel for this month emphasize the qualities needed to enter the Kingdom. The previous Sunday the gospel (Lk. 17:11-19) calls for faith; the next Sunday it will raise up humility (Lk 18: 9-14). Again, the commitment shown by the widow is a model of how children's advocates ought to conduct themselves in a society increasingly indifferent to the fate of the young.

The celebration of the Children's Sabbath might be an appropriate occasion to employ one of the three Eucharistic Prayers for Children. The novelty of the text will draw the attention of the whole congregation to the themes of the Sabbath, and the participation invited by the congregational responses, especially where they are sung, will be welcome to children.

Political Context: Some may feel ill-at-ease preaching about children's issues in a political season where "family values" have become a campaign issue. A couple of biblical considerations may help with facing that difficulty.

(1) Jesus welcomed children when his disciples would have them out of sight (Lk. 18:15-16), and praised those who would do likewise (Lk. 9:48). Accordingly, active care for children, especially those who are poor and vulnerable, is a work of God's Reign, and so beyond politics.

(2) While the Holy Family, especially as portrayed in Luke, might today be called an ideal nuclear family, in announcing the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed "the new family" of God made up of those who do God's will and love with God's lavish love. Jesus frequently replied to his opponents that outsiders like "the tax collectors and prostitutes" were entering the kingdom before the self-righteous.

There are two lessons here for this political year: (i) Our love like God's must be generous and inclusive, even in social policy; and (ii) in the Kingdom the only ones who are excluded are the self-styled "righteous."

Sample Children's Homily

> Now will God not see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night...(Lk. 18:7)

We hear today of a woman who knew her man. She sized him up, found a chink in his very thick armor, and set about winning him over to her cause. Like many of the people we meet in Luke's gospel, she's a practical person. She knows what she wants and she's determined to get it. She exhibits a holy practicality which is a unique feature of Luke's gospel.

More than the other evangelists, Luke's Jesus tells stories about men and women of action: the woman who sweeps her house clean until she finds her missing dowry coin; the Samaritan who stops to help the victim of a mugging; builders who carefully calculate their costs; a pregnant Mary who hurries from Nazareth to Judea to visit Elizabeth. It is quite characteristic that Luke's Jesus ends the Sermon on the Plain asking, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I say?"

For Luke, disciples are people of action. The kingdom belongs to "Do-ers."

Like the widow in today's parable, men and women who follow Jesus work steadily for the kingdom, when gospel values are popular and when they are out of favor, in the brief moment when victory comes easily and in the endless struggle in which they will be maligned for their commitment to a seemingly hopeless cause.

There's something else. Our widow has something to fight for. She wants justice.

In ancient Israel where widows possessed very few resources, and where the shameless rich were ready to steal from the defenseless, it took a great deal of determination to protect a family's inheritance. We can imagine the injustice the widow and presumably her children suffered. Perhaps her fields have been confiscated in a landgrab. Maybe she's been cheated in a transaction because as a single woman someone thought she didn't deserve any better — that really was an attitude in the ancient world, not something we discovered recently. Or again, maybe the ox of the people next door trampled her field and they won't make restitution. Whatever the complaint, she wants justice. And so should we.

On this Children's Sabbath, we need to identify not only with the widow's virtue, her unremitting determination, but also with her cause: justice.

The widow may well have been an older single woman, but she could equally have been the mother of a family with no male kin to support the family. Given her fierce determination, it is conceivable, in the ageless pattern of valiant women, that she haunted that judge not for her own needs but to support her children.

Despite all the talk we we hear about "family values," our society is very much like that hard-hearted judge, with "neither fear for God, nor respect for man." It is extremely reluctant to render justice for our children. Whether the need is quality education, health care, or neighborhood safety, America's children are hurting. They need advocates, like our widow, like Moses praying for the Israelites, who will not give up pleading their cause until justice is done.

If I may paraphrase the gospel, we "need to advocate continually and never lose heart."

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) sponsors this Children's Sabbath, and I invite you to read the materials provided by CDF and act upon them. Speak with the organizers of today's observance, [names], and learn how you can advocate for children here in [locality name].

The bishops of the United States are also undertaking a long-term campaign for children. In January, they issued a pastoral statement "Putting Children and Families First." In Advent and Christmas season, they will be conducting a seven-week-long program on behalf of children and families. I urge you to plan now to play an active part in that program.

Luke's story of the importunate widow is for all those who take up the cause of children in this indifferent, materialistic society. "And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to those who cry to him day and night...?' "

Our advocacy, being God's work, is like prayer. God who is father to orphans and protector of widows will see that our labors on behalf of "these little ones," like our prayers, do not go unanswered.

3.
Activity Suggestions

These suggestions can be used for church school groups, youth groups, women's, men's, or young adults meetings, or during a special time of celebration following the liturgy.

Children and Youths

- **Discuss the Children's Sabbath with the children two or three weeks in advance.** Talk about the meaning of the day, why you want to celebrate children, and why you want them to pray to God for the needs of the nation's children. Tell them what the teachers and congregation are planning and what the students' roles will be. Ask them to think of ways they could take part or would like to celebrate. If parts in a service need to be assigned, decide which children will do what.
- **A week or two in advance, have the children create a large banner to decorate the sanctuary or church school room for the Children's Sabbath.**
- **Have a children's work party clean and decorate the sanctuary or church school room(s) before the Children's Sabbath.**
- **Use the children's artwork to decorate the church building.**
- **Have the children create Leave No Child Behind T-shirts;** explain that when they wear them they will be teaching grown-ups and children an important message. Ahead of time (for younger children) print on the back "One in five children is poor. Jesus said 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.' " On the front, have the children print Leave No Child Behind and decorate with fabric markers or paints. Before or during the shirt-making, guide discussion on the meaning of the message.
- **Have young children decorate posters that are pre-printed with the slogan Leave No Child Behind**. Crayons, markers, or pictures cut from magazines can be used. Send the posters to elected officials in local, state, and national offices. Include a cover letter explaining the Children's Sabbath. Take a photograph of the children with their posters before you mail them. Display the photograph where your congregation will see it. If possible, have prints made for the children.
- **Focus the church school curriculum on biblical attitudes toward children and social justice,** as well as brief lessons concerning underprivileged children. Help the children come up with ideas of how to respond to those problems. Help them select and implement a feasible idea.
- **Encourage the youth group to devote one or more of its meetings to learning about the needs of children and what the group can do.** You may want to use or adapt the background information material found in **Section 5**.

- **With the young people, create a list of ways they can act on behalf of children in the congregation, community, or nation. Section 4: Follow-Up Suggestions** and the action suggestions in **Section 5** may provide useful ideas. The list could include writing to legislators asking them what they are doing to meet the needs of children, volunteering at a children's shelter or day care center, tutoring, and working in a food pantry or emergency shelter. Check with programs in your area for some specific suggestions to offer the young people. After the list is created, provide ways for the group to volunteer, either together or individually.
- **Help the children and young people rehearse a skit, song, or poetry readings for the fellowship time.**
- **Have the children (with adult help) prepare the refreshments for the fellowship time or coffee hour.** If low-cost items are planned (such as cupcakes made and decorated by the children), commit the money saved to a children's program in the community. Help the children select the program to be the beneficiary.

Adults

- **Organize an adult Leave No Child Behind forum.** Invite persons from the parish or Catholic social services to be on a panel to discuss the unmet needs of children and families in your community, state, and nation in the areas of health, early childhood education and development, and child poverty. Ask them to address the programs and policies that work to help children, and policies in need of change. Allow time for questions and answers. If possible, allow time to develop a plan of action based on what the group has learned.

  To secure speakers, consider contacting a representative from your community's hospital neonatal intensive care unit or health clinic to speak about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area; a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address his or her program and its needs; the director of a Catholic Charities agency that works on behalf of children.
- **Encourage the women's, men's, and young adults' groups to plan an educational program, short-term study course, or series on the needs of children.** Invite a speaker from a local child-serving program or organization advocating on behalf of children to address the group or groups. Ask the speaker to end with suggestions of what you could do to address the problem. Leave time for discussion of these possibilities and an action plan.
- **Arrange a Children's Awareness Tour for members of your parish.** Arrange visits with public and private agencies concerned with children and families. Invite business and religious leaders, public officials, and members of the media to join you. Help participants consider how they can use their personal and professional roles to meet the needs of children.
- **Write to or telephone candidates' offices and ask for their position papers, or information, on children's issues.** Make this information available to parish members.
- **Invite candidates for public office to a forum to hear about the problems of chil-**

dren in your community and to talk about how they intend to work with you to address those problems.

All Ages

- **Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a children's organization.** Work with the youth group to plan and carry out the activity and to select the organization to receive the donation. Build an educational component into the fund-raising activity. If it is a car wash or bake sale, for instance, work with the organization to create and then hand out flyers with information about the particular problem being addressed by the organization, and how the organization is helping. If the organization has volunteer or other needs, publicize those as well.
- **Plan for the children and adults to plant a tree** outside the church to commemorate the Children's Sabbath.
- **Start a congregational scrapbook to commemorate the Children's Sabbath.** Purchase a scrapbook with plenty of removable pages. Spread the pages on tables with markers, pens, and crayons. Invite children, youths, and adults to contribute by drawing or writing their thoughts and feelings about the Children's Sabbath and what they learned. Some may want to record a prayer for children. Some families may want to work on a family page. Ahead of time, ask particular youths (or children with adult supervisors) to serve as official photographers for the day. After the Sabbath, compile the scrapbook and make it available for parish members to peruse. Plan to add to it during the next Children's Sabbath celebrated by your church.
- **Organize a trip to a food bank,** where families in the parish can bring food and help with sorting, bagging, or other tasks. Find out what **World Food Day** (October 16) activities have been planned by individuals and organizations in your community, and how your congregation might be involved as an extension of its Children's Sabbath observance.
- Find out if any individuals or organizations are planning activities for **Peace with Justice Week** (October 16-24) in your community. If so, explore how you might participate or connect your Children's Sabbath observance with their efforts. If not, you may want to promote children's issues as the theme for Peace with Justice week in your community.

4.
Follow-Up Suggestions

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
>
> *I Corinthians 12:4-7*

Reflect on the meaning of this passage and consider ways that your parish can understand and use the gifts of its members for the good of children.

The following range of suggestions is divided into three categories: *education* on the needs of children; *service* to meet these needs; and *advocacy* on behalf of children.

The suggestions could be initiated, planned, and implemented by the priest(s), the social action committee, church school teachers, adult or youth groups, or by a new committee with representatives of these groups and other concerned individuals. Consider sharing copies of these suggestions with representatives of each group, and then arrange a time to discuss how the congregation or groups within it might commit to long-term action with and for children.

Education

> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit....
>
> *I Corinthians 12:8*

Reflect on the meaning of this passage and consider ways that you and your parish can search for wisdom and share knowledge about the needs of children. For example:

- Write to the U.S. Catholic Conference and ask for its materials about children in the United States and around the world. Commit a shelf in your church library to display information on children in need and highlight possibilities for outreach and advocacy action. Recruit volunteers to update it regularly.
- If the Children's Sabbath observance did not include educational forums or meetings, set aside a future meeting date and invite a representative from a children's organization to speak about children's issues and ways the congregation can help.
- Invite several parishioners to write articles for the parish newsletter summarizing what they have learned about children's issues. Consider asking a child, a youth, and an adult to write and share their unique perspectives on the Children's Sabbath observance and the issues it highlighted.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the unmet needs of families and children in your area and encourage strong local action.

- Learn about the status of children in your community. Find out which child-serving organizations would benefit most from some form of assistance. Assess your parish resources (human, financial, and physical) and make an appropriate commitment to help.
- Find out what support services are available for children and families, and publicize their availability in the church and in the community. If support services in your community are inadequate, consider supplementing or establishing new ones by teaming up with other religious or professional organizations.
- If the Children's Sabbath did not include a Children's Awareness Tour for the congregation (see page 18), plan a suitable date for one.

SERVICE

> Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you...?'
>
> And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'
>
> *Matthew 25:37-40*

Reflect on the meaning of this passage from Matthew and how God calls to us to reach out to the poor and deprived.

- Consider donating space to a program serving children, youths, and families or to an organization advocating on behalf of children. Consider Head Start or child care programs, parent support groups, and others.
- Maintain an updated listing of child-serving organizations with volunteer opportunities. Describe the skills, interests, and time required for each position, and encourage congregation members to reflect on how they would best like to help children: tutoring, fund raising, or lending professional skills such as nursing to an organization. Publicize volunteer opportunities in the church newsletter.
- "Adopt" a child-serving organization, providing a range of assistance such as financial support, donation of goods, or professional expertise in fund raising, promotion, or management.
- If your parish is suitably located, sponsor free hearing and vision testing. Contact the local school board for information about clinics that administer these tests at public schools. Publicize the event to day care centers, shelters for homeless women and families, and in low-income neighborhoods. Or hold monthly "free doctor/dentist" days, using members of your parish and other religious groups participating. Publicize the days, times, and addresses in targeted areas.
- Organize a parish service corps among the teenagers in your church. Establish a youth coordinating committee to plan and implement the service corps.

ADVOCACY

> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
>
> *Isaiah 58:6*

Reflect on the meaning of this passage from Isaiah and on God's call to work for justice.

- Monitor legislation affecting children and families, and inform your representatives of your views. Organizations such as the U.S. Catholic Conference, state Catholic conferences, Bread for the World, and the Children's Defense Fund provide information — from a faith perspective — about pending legislation. Monitor the impact of the legislation on your community or state.
- Write the president and your U.S. representative and senators. Describe your concern about the state of children. Ask them what they will do to Leave No Child Behind and ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start. Ask for a reply. Write to:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

- Write your governor, state senator, state representative, and mayor urging them to support effective federal, state, and local investments in children. State and local child advocacy organizations have information on legislation. Do your part in making sure programs for children are well implemented.
- Organize meetings with candidates, elected officials, and staff to learn more about their positions on children's issues and to provide them with information on the needs of children and how to meet those needs.
- Call CDF's legislative hotline tape, (202) 662-3591, for information and needed action on pending legislation affecting children and families.

5.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section contains background information, reflection or discussion questions, and action suggestions for three areas: maternal and child health, early childhood development, and child and family poverty.

This material can be used:

- As background information for a homily focusing on children;
- As the basis of an education program for adults or the youth group; or
- To help the social action committee explore new directions for addressing the needs of children and families.

A HEALTHY START FOR EVERY CHILD

The prophecy from Isaiah proclaims these promises of God: "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth....No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime." (Isaiah 65:17a, 19b, 20a)

Thousands of years ago, when this vision of God's new creation was recorded, many parents helplessly watched their babies die because they lacked the knowledge and resources to prevent the premature deaths of their children.

Today, too many parents still watch their babies die. Each year in America 40,000 babies die before reaching their first birthday, a rate worse than those of 19 other nations. And 400,000 children who do survive will be left with lifelong disabilities such as retardation, cerebral palsy, and vision, learning, and hearing disabilities.

Unlike in Isaiah's day, we have the knowledge and resources to prevent much of this suffering. A White House Task Force on infant mortality determined in 1989 that one in four of all U.S. infant deaths and disabilities is fully preventable with well-known and cost-effective health measures such as early, comprehensive prenatal care for pregnant women. Yet nearly 25 percent of all U.S. infants are born to mothers who do not receive care early in pregnancy.

America's children are falling behind the world's children in their access to health care and in their health status in other areas as well. Our children are less likely to be fully immunized against polio in infancy than children from Pakistan or Poland. The United States ranks seventeenth in the world in fully immunizing one-year-olds against polio.

Our failure to invest in proven, preventive care results in enormous moral, social, and economic costs. For instance, in addition to the incalculable toll in human suffering, the infant mortality gap between the United States and Japan costs our nation about $7 billion per year.

Why do America's pregnant women, infants, and children fail to get the preventive health care they need? One reason is that more than 30 million Americans live in communities where they have little access to basic health care. These are usually rural or inner-city areas without enough doctors or clinics. For example, the government's studies show that the recent decline in immunization rates and the 16-fold increase in measles cases were caused by the rapidly shrinking access of American children to health services—not to parents' failure to use available services.

The second main reason is that millions of American children and their families have no health insurance. Between 9 million and 11 million children and 10.6 million women of childbearing age are completely uninsured. Millions of others have insurance that is inadequate, failing to cover essential services such as well-child visits, prenatal care, or immunizations.

Today, our nation has both the knowledge and the resources to prevent unnecessary child deaths, disabilities, and illness, as the prophet envisioned God's intention for a new creation. How can we participate in realizing that hopeful vision?

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How does the vision of God's new creation as recorded in Isaiah speak to the health of our nation's children today?
- What do you consider to be the moral costs of our nation's failure to provide preventive, affordable health care to all children? What are the social costs? What are the economic costs?
- Are we — as a faith community or as a nation — responsible for helping every child get a Healthy Start? Explain.
- What are some of the child health needs that your group knows are not being met in your community?
- What resources are available in your parish to meet the health needs of children? Consider finances, volunteers, and facilities or equipment.
- Can you identify specific issues within child health that your group is interested in pursuing? How might you go about organizing an activity for your group or parish?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child a Healthy Start?

We must make certain that all Americans have either private or public health insurance and that health care is available to children and their families wherever they may live. We must give all our children a good start in life, by guaranteeing that *all* mothers can get early, regular prenatal care and that *all* children can get the vaccines, the checkups, and the prompt treatment that will start them on the road to healthy development.

As a parish or as one person of faith, we can participate in working toward a "new creation" of health and wholeness. We can:

Learn More

- Invite a representative from your community's hospital or health clinic to speak to your parish about the unmet health needs of pregnant women and children in your area.

- Arrange a visit to a health clinic, Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) site, or neonatal intensive care unit, and find out what can be done to improve the health of children and families.

Reach Out

- Arrange to use the parish van or your private vehicle to transport pregnant women or parents and children to care health appointments.
- Offer a prenatal care class through your parish.
- Donate church space for immunization clinics.
- "Adopt" a health clinic and provide financial support and volunteers.
- Provide child care for children while their mothers go for prenatal care.

Speak Out

- Meet with people running for office. Tell candidates that children should be an important election year issue. Tell them all American children need a Healthy Start.
- Write and call legislators and candidates and ask them how they will meet child health needs.
- Speak out for children at town meetings and candidate forums. You could ask questions such as:
    - "What will you do to ensure that all young children are immunized fully?"
    - "What steps would you support to ensure that all pregnant women have full access to prenatal care and that all children receive regular preventive health care and treatment?"
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. You can use the facts that you have learned today, or write to the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for free materials to help ensure that we Leave No Child Behind in this election year and insist that every child is given a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start.

A Head Start for Every Child

Listen to the hopeful prayer of the psalmist: "May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars, cut for the building of a palace." (Psalms 144:12)

What kind of early childhood experiences and environment do the sons and daughters of our nation need to flourish as plants full grown, and to be as solid and stable as corner pillars of a palace?

In the infant and toddler years, a youngster needs good nutrition and health, a strong and nurturing family, and the varied and rich early childhood experiences that will encourage rather than stifle curiosity and eagerness to learn. By the time the child is three or four years old, some of those experiences are likely to be taking place outside the home, in a child care home or center, or at a preschool, and those experiences also should be safe, loving, and stimulating.

In 1990, recognizing that these early childhood experiences are crucial to success in school and after, President Bush and the governors named school readiness for all young children the first of six national education goals. Yet available indicators of the well-being of young children show how woefully far we are from reaching the goal.

Very modest investments during the early years have been shown to save much larger sums later. Every $1 spent on high quality preschool education saves an estimated $3 in later special education, crime, welfare, and other costs. Yet Head Start, which Congress and the Bush Administration promised to fund fully by 1994, had funding to serve fewer than one in three eligible children in 1991.

Our communities, our work places, and our nation offer little support for parents engaged in the extraordinarily difficult task of caring for young children. Unlike 16 other industrialized nations, including Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the United States has no family leave policy (paid or unpaid) to allow parents to stay home with an infant without jeopardizing their jobs and income.

Unlike those same nations, we have failed to ensure the availability of high quality, affordable child care. Although 61 percent of mothers with children ages three to five were in the labor force by the end of the 1980s, the National Research Council concluded in 1990 that "Poor...quality [child] care threatens children's development, especially children from poor and minority families."

Our continued failure to attend to the well-being of young children is not only a tragic waste of their potential, but a gamble with our nation's economic future. Among our major competitors, the United States stands out for its paucity of efforts to ensure that children enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure.

Head Start

Head Start is the successful preschool program for disadvantaged three- to five-year-olds that ideally should be available to every eligible child.

Experts in early childhood development say that Head Start's success in preparing children for productive lives is based on two important elements. First, the program is comprehensive. Recognizing that children who are undernourished or have untreated medical problems cannot learn efficiently, Head Start provides hot meals, immunization against childhood diseases, and screening and treatment for vision, hearing, and other medical and dental problems.

Second, Head Start supports children's healthy development by strengthening their families. Head Start teaches parents to see themselves as the primary teachers and advocates for their children. In addition, Head Start provides family counseling and referral to other community resources and government assistance programs, trains parent volunteers to work in the program, encourages them to continue their own education, and employs parents of students as more than one-third of its paid staff members.

The combination of comprehensive services and family involvement pays off for Head Start children. Research consistently shows that children who attend Head Start score higher on achievement tests and are more likely to meet the basic requirements for school than control groups. Once in school, Head Start graduates are less likely to be placed in special education classes or to be held back in school than other children from similar backgrounds.

And young adults who participated in preschool programs similar to Head Start are more likely than their peers to be literate and employed or enrolled in postsecondary education. They are less likely to be school dropouts, teen parents, dependent on welfare, or in trouble with the law.

Despite its record of success, Head Start never has received enough funding to both increase enrollments and cover rising costs. The landmark reauthorization of Head Start in 1990 created the potential for yearly increases in Head Start enrollment (subject to appropriations by Congress) until the program is able to serve all eligible children starting in 1994, at a cost of $7.7 billion. The reauthorization also earmarked more money for quality improvements, including funds for staff training, established new criteria for classroom teachers, approved a new transition program to continue Head Start's comprehensive services for children after they enter school, and allowed funds to be used for full-day, full-year child care for Head Start students whose parents work.

For more information about Head Start, contact:

Children's Defense Fund
Child Care Division
25 E Street, N.W
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

National Head Start Association
1220 King Street
Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 739-0875

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- What are some of the factors that help children develop to their God-given potential, flourishing "like plants full grown"?
- What are some of the supports that help parents raise healthy, secure children?
- How does your parish currently help provide positive early childhood experiences or support for parents?
- Is supporting and strengthening families an appropriate role for a faith community? Why or why not?
- What are some of the needs for early childhood or parent support programs in your parish or community?
- What are some of the resources (human, financial, and in-kind) available in your group or in your parish that might be directed to address early childhood needs or parent support?
- In which of the issues within early childhood development are group members most interested? How might you develop an activity for your group or parish?

What Can We Do To Ensure Every Child a Head Start?

To ensure that all of our nation's children have a Head Start and enter school healthy, strong, intellectually curious, and emotionally secure, we must commit ourselves to each of the steps required to meet that goal:

- Family leave policies that enable parents to care for an infant without jeopardizing the family's income;

- A place in Head Start for every eligible child, as promised by President Bush and Congress;
- High quality and affordable child care available in all communities for all children;
- Community programs that help support parents in providing a secure and stimulating environment for their children's development.

As a parish or as individuals, to help give every child a Head Start, we can:

Learn More

- Visit a Head Start program to see it in action. Arrange a time to talk with the teachers and parents, if possible, to learn about the program's strengths, as well as the existing barriers to its effectiveness. Find out what individuals or parishioners can do to support the program and the children it serves.
- Invite a Head Start staff person or child care provider to address your parish about her or his program and its needs.
- Learn more about community programs that support families (generally called family resource, family support, or parent education programs) by helping strengthen parents to meet the challenges of raising children and respond more fully to their children's needs. Determine if your parish might support an existing program or help develop one.
- Contact the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009) and the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001) for more information on child care and Head Start programs and on pertinent legislation.

Reach Out

- Support a child care or Head Start program by volunteering or providing financial support or material goods. Or explore the possibilities of housing a Head Start program in your church.
- Until there is adequate funding for full-day, full-year Head Start programs, explore how your parish might provide a supplementary after-school or summer program for Head Start students.
- Organize a fund-raising activity to benefit a child care program, or set up a scholarship fund to help parents who cannot afford child care.
- Develop or house an after-school child care program or full-day child care program in your church. Excellent resources to assist you are available from: The Ecumenical Child Care Network, 1580 N. Northwest Highway, Parkridge, IL 60068-1456.

Speak Out

- Attend candidate forums and ask the candidates how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start. If they are candidates for state office, ask them what they believe your state should do to increase the availability of affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs.

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about the need for strong early childhood programs for every child and policies that support parents.
- Arrange to take candidates to visit Head Start or child care centers and to brief them on the need for available, affordable, quality child care, preschool, and early childhood development programs. Ask them how they will ensure that every child gets a Head Start.

A Fair Start for Every Child

In Proverbs 31:8-9 we read "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Who are "the poor and needy" today in our nation?

Infants and children are, in fact, the poorest Americans. More than 13.4 million American children — one out of every five — live in poverty.

The fact that children are the most common victims of poverty is not the only startling fact disproving widely held stereotypes about who is poor:

- Most poor families with children have at least one worker, and earnings from employment, not welfare, are their largest source of income.
- More poor children are white (5.9 million) than are black (3.7 million).
- More poor American children are living outside central cities than inside them.
- Nearly two-thirds of all poor families with children have only one or two children.
- And while single-parenthood drives up poverty rates, even if the United States had no children in single-parent families we still would have one of the highest child poverty rates among all industrialized societies.

Why Have So Many Children Become Poor?

The child poverty crisis is worsening, rather than getting better. In 1990 alone, 840,000 children were added to the ranks of the poor. Child poverty has increased by more than 25 percent since 1979. There were 3 million more poor children in 1990 than 11 years earlier.

The declining effectiveness of government income programs in bringing families with children up above the poverty line accounted for **nearly half** of the increase in the poverty rate among families with children between 1979 and 1989. More than half of all government cash transfer payments (from programs such as Social Security, veterans benefits, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children) go to nonpoor families. Only $1 in every $12 of such payments in 1987 went to families with children that were poor or would have been poor in the absence of that government help. Government spending cuts during the 1980s also hurt poor families with children.

Changes in the job market that increased unemployment, lowered earnings, and left more workers unable to support their families were responsible for **almost one-third** of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children. For example, the minimum wage is worth less than 80 percent of its real (inflation-adjusted) 1979 value. As a result, full-time, year-round work at the minimum wage ($8,840) isn't nearly enough to bring a family of three above the poverty line (an estimated $10,723 in 1991).

The increase in the proportion of children living in single-parent families (a phenomenon in part driven by earnings declines) was the third but relatively smallest major force, contributing **about one-fourth** of the increase in the poverty rate of families with children.

Impossible Choices: A Group Exercise in Understanding Child and Family Poverty

In a group discussion of child poverty, distribute photocopies of the "Impossible Choices" box on page 31. Have a volunteer read aloud the first paragraph, which sets out a typical example of poverty as it affects a working family. Then ask group members to fill in the worksheet as you read the following information to them:

> "Working full-time, year-round at a job above the minimum wage yields you $824 per month. So on the blank line next to 'wages' on your worksheet, please fill in $824."

When group members have done so, read aloud the following:

> "The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that it costs $309 a month to provide a nutritionally adequate diet over the long term for a three-person family such as this. So, please fill in $309 on the blank line next to 'Food.'*"

When group members have done so, read the following:

> "In 1991 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-determined average Fair Market Rent for a modest, two-bedroom apartment in the United States was $510. The recommended limit for a family's housing costs is one-third of its income. By that calculation, this family should be living in housing that costs no more than $274 a month."

Have group members fill in the $510 HUD-determined figure for rent.* When group members have done so, ask them to fill in the blank next to child care with "$165.00" for the three-year-old (the 10-year-old stays with a neighbor after school), which is the average monthly cost of child care for one child.

Then, ask group members to fill in the "Subtotal" blank. This subtotal should be $984.00.

By comparing the "wages" figure ($824) and the basic expenses ($984), group members can see the difficulty of making ends meet for this parent who works full time. How do families such as this manage?

One potential source of income is child support. While state agencies are supposed to help collect child support payments from delinquent spouses, it's collected in fewer

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* Some group members may suggest that the three-person family could spend less on food or housing. Remind them that if they wish to skimp on food, resulting in a nutritionally inadequate diet, they may need to factor in later health costs. Likewise, if a group member believes the family could find cheaper housing, ask the group what some of the hidden costs of substandard housing might be (such as health costs and irreversible damage due to lead exposure).

Impossible Choices

You are the single parent of two children ages three and 10. You work full time, year-round, at a job above minimum wage. Still, your earnings of $9,885 leave your family at the poverty line. Your employer does not provide health insurance. Your ex-spouse fails to provide court-ordered child support of $100 per month.

To understand the impossible choices facing poor families, decide how you would try to make ends meet:

Income		*Basic Expenses*	
Wages:	$_____ per month	Food:	$_____ per month
Child support:	$_____ per month	Rent & utilities:	$_____ per month
EIC:	$_____ per month	Child care:	$_____ per month
AFDC:	$_____ per month	Subtotal:	$_____ per month
Food stamps and housing assistance:	$_____ per month	**Surplus for all other expenses:**	
Subtotal:	$_____ per month	**$_____ per month**	

Family Needs Beyond Food and Shelter

The following are expenses for family needs beyond food, shelter, and child care. Which could you afford? Which would you forgo?

Selected household expenditures	*Average monthly expenditures of low-income* three-person households, 1988-1989*
Car upkeep/gas/public transportation	$142
Furniture/household equipment	48
Children's clothes	23
Adult clothes	39
Telephone	41
Health expenses	86
Housekeeping supplies	29
Educational expenses/reading	22
Insurance	16
Total	**$446**

* Income less than $20,000

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey. Calculations by the Children's Defense Fund.

than one in three cases. In 1989, $5.1 billion in court-ordered child support went unpaid by absent parents. Have your group write $0 next to child support.

Another source of support is the Earned Income Credit available to low-income working families on a *refundable basis*, meaning that working families such as this whose incomes are so low that they owe no federal taxes can receive a check for the credit. If the parent chooses, employers must add EIC benefits to regular paychecks. Tell group members that this family's Earned Income Credit, per month, would be $102.91 (for an annual total of $1,235). Instruct them to fill in that figure on the line next to "EIC."

Inform them that many families that are eligible for this credit fail to obtain it because they do not know they are eligible, or they don't know how to complete the forms to get the credit.

(Optional: Select several group members to represent families that do not know about the Earned Income Credit or how to receive it. While everyone else is asked to add $102.91 to their monthly income, tell those persons selected to enter $0, to understand the impact of that lost benefit and the need for community outreach to help eligible families receive it.)

Group members will see that this working family still will not be able to keep its head above water financially without additional support. Another source of support for some poor families is the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) grant. The size of AFDC grants vary by state. The nation's average maximum monthly AFDC benefit for a three-person family in January 1992 was $372.

To see if this family is eligible for AFDC, food stamps, or housing assistance and how much money they would receive in your state, call your state welfare department. If this family is eligible for any of these benefits in your state, tell group members to fill in the amount the family would receive on the appropriate line next to AFDC or food stamps and housing assistance. If this family does not meet your state's "standard of need," leave the line(s) blank. Tell the group that nationwide the average poor family with children got only $141 in food and housing benefits a month in 1989.

Ask group members now to subtotal their income, and subtract their basic expenses and child care costs from that subtotal. After arriving at a figure, the group should fill in the amount on the line next to "Surplus for all other expenses."

Reflection or Discussion Questions

- How did you feel when you learned that children are the most common victims of poverty? Which fact surprised you the most?
- How do you think our society's misconceptions about who is poor affect our response?
- What responsibility do you feel to "Speak out for those who cannot speak"? What responsibility do you believe our nation has to "defend the rights of the poor and needy"?
- What would be the hardest aspect of being a working parent who is only able to keep your family teetering on the brink of the poverty line?
- How would you try to manage if you were this parent? Which expenses would you have to forgo or cut back? What might be the hidden costs of spending less on food, housing, child care, or health care?

- What might be the impact of one illness, such as an ear infection?
- If you were this parent, what would be the greatest help or support for which you would hope?
- What are some of the poverty-related problems that you see facing children in your community or throughout the state?
- What resources are available in your congregation to meet the needs of poor children and families? For example, finances, volunteers, and facilities or equipment.
- Can you identify specific issues within child poverty that your group is interested in pursuing? If so, how might you go about organizing an activity?

What Can We Do To Give Every Child a Fair Start?

It is essential to this nation's moral and economic future that we eliminate child poverty, a goal well within our reach by the year 2000. As a nation, it is time to honor our pro-family rhetoric with action by providing a floor of support under every child, through:

- Decent wages and job opportunities;
- An adequate refundable child tax credit and other refundable tax credits;
- Child support guarantees;
- Parental leave policies.

As a parish or as one person, we can raise our voices on behalf of our nation's children who are voiceless and powerless in the halls of government.

Learn More

- Know the facts about child poverty in your community, state, and the nation. The Children's Defense Fund has information and resources to help you both learn about and address the needs of children through education, outreach, and public policy advocacy. See page 36 for additional organizations and written resources to help you.
- Visit a local program that serves low-income children and families. Ask the service providers what problems they see facing children and families. Ask what they need to serve the children better — financial support, volunteers, donation of goods, and changes in public policies.

Reach Out

- Provide support to a local program that serves low-income children and families by volunteering, making a financial donation, or providing needed items.
- Participate in the Earned Income Credit community outreach project to help eligible low-income working families learn about and obtain this credit. For more information, write to: The 1992 Earned Income Credit Campaign, The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 777 N. Capitol St., N.E., Suite 705, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 408-1080.

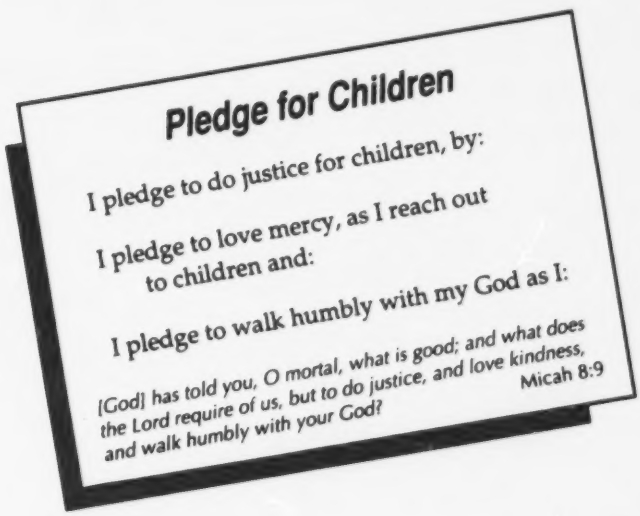
Speak Out

- Speak out about public policies on the local, state, and federal level that affect children and families. Contact the U.S. Catholic Conference, Bread for the World, or the Children's Defense Fund Office of Religious Affairs for information to help you faithfully advocate on behalf of children and families.
- Attend candidate forums and ask candidates how they will ensure that every child has a Fair Start. Additional questions might be:
    - "How do you propose to reduce childhood poverty in America?"
    - "Will you work to ensure that any congressional tax relief proposal includes a refundable tax credit that will benefit all families with children?"
    - "What steps would you take to ensure that custodial parents receive the child support payments to which they are entitled?"
- Arrange a "site visit" to take candidates to visit programs that are serving poor children and families, as well as to sites that demonstrate the need for stronger leadership and improved policies to help poor children and families, such as neonatal intensive care units where two-pound babies reveal the costs of our nation's failure to invest in prenatal and preventive health care for all pregnant women and children.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing what you have learned about child poverty and urging strong action from every sector of the community — from government to business to media to the religious community.

APPENDIX

ORDER *FREE* POSTCARDS FOR YOUR CONGREGATION!

Involve your congregation in helping America's children! Multiple copies of two Pledge for Children postcards are available *free* from the Children's Defense Fund. Use the Response Form on page 38 to order.

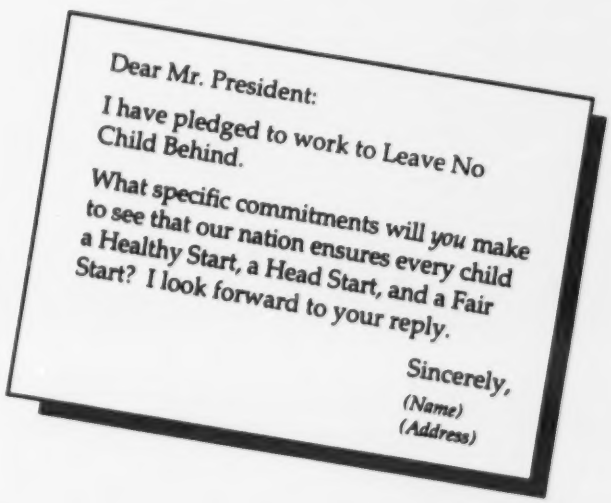

Pledge for Children
I pledge to do justice for children, by:
I pledge to love mercy, as I reach out to children and:
I pledge to walk humbly with my God as I:
[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?
Micah 8:9

PLEDGE FOR CHILDREN

Make a pledge of commitment to the children in your congregation, community, and nation. Keep the pledge portion of the card to remind you how to plan to do justice for children, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Send the other portion of the card in for additional information about what *you* can do for America's children!

TO THE PRESIDENT

Let the President know that you have made a Pledge for Children, and ask what he will do to make sure our nation leaves no child behind! Send the postcard back to the Children's Defense Fund – we'll deliver thousands to the White House from congregants across the country at the start of the new presidential term.


Dear Mr. President:
I have pledged to work to Leave No Child Behind.
What specific commitments will you make to see that our nation ensures every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, and a Fair Start? I look forward to your reply.
Sincerely,
(Name)
(Address)

Resources for Faithful Child Advocacy

Organizations

Department of Social Development and World Peace
U.S. Catholic Conference
3211 4th Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20017
(202) 541-3185

Catholic Charities USA
1731 King Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 549-1390

Bread for the World
802 Rhode Island Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20018
(202) 269-0200

Children's Defense Fund
Office of Religious Affairs
25 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

Program Resources

Print

Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families: Final Report of the National Commission on Children, 1991. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Children, single copy free. Assesses the status of children and families in the United States and proposes directions for policy and program development for the 1990s, many of which Catholics could endorse.

A Catholic Campaign for Children: Parish Resource Booklet. Washington, D.C.: USCC Publishing Services (No. 529-9), $4.95 plus $2.25 shipping. A series of resources that can help a parish integrate a focus on children and families into all aspects of parish life. Each parish will receive one complimentary copy upon publication in Fall 1992. Abridged edition also available in Spanish (no. 534-8).

Every Fifth Child. Washington, D.C.: Bread for the World. The 1992 Offering of Letters from Bread for the World is a legislative effort to address the causes of childhood hunger through increased funding for domestic programs.

Families: Black and Catholic, Catholic and Black. Washington, D.C.: USCC Publishing Services, 1985 (No. 890-8), $15.95. Readings, resources, and family activities.

Families, the Economy, and the Church: A Book of Readings and Discussion Guide. Washington, D.C.: USCC Publishing Services, 1987 (no. 136-9), $5.95. Examines issues of economic justice as they affect the family's economic functions and responsibilities.

A Family Perspective in Church and Society. NCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Marriage & Family Life. Washington, D.C.: USCC Publishing Services (No. 191-1), $7.95. Manual for pastoral leaders suggesting the implementation of a "family perspective" in the church's ministry.

Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation, and World. Washington, D.C.: USCC Publishing Services (No. 469-4), $1.95. This pastoral statement examines the needs of all children in an increasingly difficult world. It presents the moral and religious dimension of caring for children.

Children and Families: Suggestions for Parish Social Ministry, Catholic Charities USA, a four-page pamphlet with ideas and recommended resources for pastors, members of parish staff, and parish volunteers to strengthen their efforts for children.

Children Let Us Love: Children's Activity Booklet, 1992 Reformed Church Press, 1992. Published in cooperation with and available from Bread for the World Institute, 60 cents each.

"Putting Our Children First," Background Paper, Bread for the World, 1992, 25 cents each.

The State of America's Children 1992, Children's Defense Fund, 1992, $14.95.

Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches, by Kathleen A. Guy, Children's Defense Fund, 1991, $14.95.

Audiovisuals

I Am Only a Child. 14 min., Silver Spring, Md.: Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc., $24.95. A compelling reflection of the state of children—in our nation and world. A good vehicle for promoting *The Catholic Campaign for Children* in response to the bishops' statement *Putting Children and Families First.* Also available for rent in slide/tape format from the USCC Dept. of Social Development and World Peace.

The Campaign to End Childhood Hunger. 12 min., Washington, D.C.: Food Research and Action Center, $15.00. Gives an overview of childhood hunger in the United States and measures to relieve it.

RESPONSE FORM

❑ **Yes,** I would like _____ (quantity) of the Pledge for Children postcards, free of charge. Please send them to:

Name _____

Church _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Telephone _____

❑ My congregation will be conducting Children's Sabbath activities on:

_____
(date)

We plan to:

- ❑ Focus the liturgy on children's issues through the homily, prayers, or other: _____
- ❑ Involve children and youths more fully in the liturgy.
- ❑ Use the Pledge for Children postcard.
- ❑ Have special parish activities, including: _____

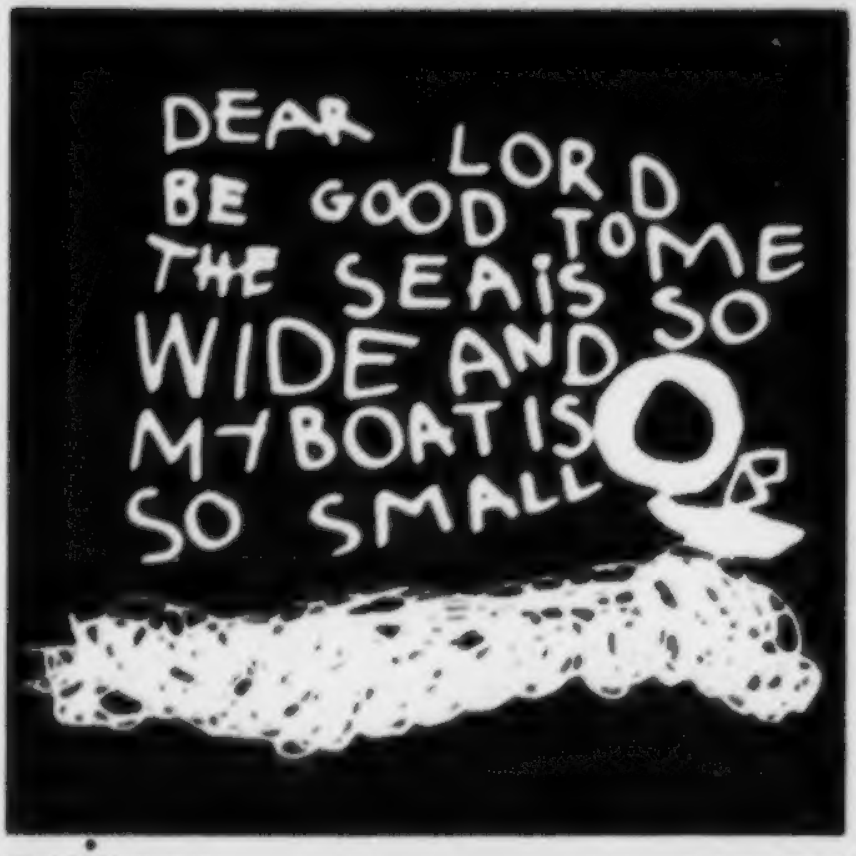
  _____
- ❑ Use the bulletin/newsletter inserts or news release.
- ❑ Develop long-term follow-up activities.
- ❑ Hold an adult education program or youth group meeting on children's issues.
- ❑ Other: _____

  _____

  _____

Please remove this page and mail it in an envelope to: Religious Affairs, Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

Order postcards early to be sure you have them in time for your Children's Sabbath activities!



Children's Defense Fund

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